LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS VO'EIRA

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS VO'EIRA

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Vo'eira* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our

understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Vo'eira is obviously a fundamental parsha because it deals with the Ten Plagues and the promise of Redemption.

I have also appended an earlier work, entitled Ten Plague Therapy, which attempts to explain each plague as a source of spiritual therapy as well as the connection of these Ten Plagues to the future and Final Redemption.

ESSAY ONE

THE NAMELESS, UBIQUITOUS PHARAOH

The face expresses one's inner feelings.

When a person shows you their face they are inviting you into their inner space.

In Hebrew the word for face-*panim* is synonymous with the word *pnimiyus*-which denotes inwardness.

When we show someone our face, we are communicating with them.

ESSAY ONE

THE NAMELESS, UBIQUITOUS PHARAOH

Pharaoh Appears More Frequently than Moses!

The central figure of the Biblical story of the Exodus is obviously Moses. However, in this week's parsha Pharaoh's name appears even more frequently than that of Moses. Indeed, Pharaoh—or as he is mentioned simply as the "king of Egypt"—occurs more often in the Book of Exodus (through the story of the destruction of the Egyptian forces at the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds) than Moses!

How is it that a villain as evil as Pharaoh should be so highlighted in the Torah?

Another question asked is why is it that Pharaoh's actual name is never mentioned in the Torah?

Almost all other kings that are mentioned in the Torah are mentioned by name. When Abraham joins the battle between the alliance of four kings and the alliance of five kings, all of the nine king's names are provided for in the Biblical text. Likewise dozens of other monarchs whose names—not just their titles—are mentioned throughout

Biblical literature. Why then are the names of the Pharaohs absent in the Torah?

Pharaoh: A Pain in the Neck

The answer to these two questions lies in the mystical significance of the title Pharaoh. The masters of Kabbalah teach us that the letters of the Hebrew word Pharaoh, when rearranged, spells the word *ha'oref*, which means the back; or more precisely, the nape of the neck.

These two anatomical features—the face and the back or nape of the neck—represent two diametrically opposite physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dynamics.

The face expresses one's inner feelings. When we look at the face of another person we can tell if the person is happy or sad, pleased or angry, consonant with the expression: "It's written all over his face." When a person shows you their face they are inviting you into their inner space.

It is interesting to note that while in the English language the word face connotes the surface or outward appearance of something—as in the expression, "at face value"—in Hebrew the word for face-*panim* is synonymous with the word *pnimiyut*-which denotes inwardness. In Modern

Hebrew the word "internalize" is *l'hafnim*, cognate to the word *panim*.face.

When people show you their face, they are communicating with you. And often it is a more profound communication than the one that occurs through calculated words. In these days, we are witness to modern technological advances that will produce electronic devices that can read a person's intentions by just examining his or her facial features.

By contrast, when people have their back towards us we know virtually nothing about their personality, attitude, frame of mind, disposition etc. Standing with their back towards another expresses the most superficial and external connection that they may have with the other.

What is true for humans serves as a metaphor for the reciprocal relationship G-d has with us and we have with Him.

G-d, Show us Your Face!

There are two ways G-d relates to us. He can either show us His face. This means, metaphorically speaking of course, that when G-d generates His light and energy to us, He can do it with a sense of satisfaction and delight. This is what happens when we go out of our way to show Him our face. When we express our innermost feelings of love and

reverence for Him in the performance of the Mitzvos, when our face beams with joy and delight at the opportunity to serve G-d, G-d reciprocates by showing us His face; His most profound faculties. When we eschew superficiality in our relationship with Him, G-d reveals to us His deeper feelings as well. His concern for us is not perfunctory. His supervision over us is more pronounced and revealed.

But there is another dynamic that occurs in the human-G-d relationship. When someone turns his back on G-d, so to speak, G-d may still generate His light to us to give us life, but He will do so by figuratively "turning His back" towards us and show us no deep feeling, no joy. When that happens our lives are rendered devoid of any real joy and depth.

Our "sterile" relationship with G-d translates in all areas of life and adversely affects our interpersonal relationships as well. We become lethargic, petty, withdrawn, judgmental and rather dull. Charisma derives from having the ability to express our inner personalities; when we can show our face. When we lack that—because we are connected to G-d's "back" rather than His face—we can even degenerate into pure unmitigated evil.

Enter Pharaoh-*ha-oreph*!

Poker-Faced Pharaoh

Pharaoh was the very personification of the lackluster uncharismatic leader, who has no real identity because he is always having his back towards G-d, Moses, the Jewish people and his own people and indeed all of history. Pharaoh, the Kabbalists teach us, derived from G-d's "back."

To be sure, Pharaoh was actually physically facing Moses. Nevertheless, he was the ultimate spiritual poker-faced individual. His face was no better than his back. He was one faceless individual with no depth and no true personality. Pharaoh exclaims "I don't know G-d." The term knowing" in Biblical parlance indicated intimate knowledge as in "Adam knew Eve." He was right. The Pharaoh mentality cannot develop any deep and intimate relationship with G-d or with other people.

However, it is precisely these faceless and dull "back" personalities that can be very dangerous. A person who has nothing internal and deep to offer will just try to show their power. They have no self-esteem and they therefore have to be the bullies to give them some measure of security. Pharaoh the ultimate personification of the uncharismatic monarch has to become the bully and tyrant who exclaims, "The River is mine and I have made myself." He is a self-proclaimed god!

Even when he sees how much the plagues have destroyed his country he remains stubbornly attached to his insistence that he will not let the Israelites go. Indeed, the term *ha'oref*, is also used to describe a "stiff-necked" person. Pharaoh was the embodiment of the irrational stubborn individual who will go down and take everyone with him rather than do what's right.

We can now understand why Pharaoh's specific name is not mentioned in the Torah because the hallmark of the Pharaoh's was their "back-ness"—the absence of a true personality.

But why were the Pharaohs more faceless than other pagan and evil monarchs?

Mitzraim: A Land that Breeds Facelessness

The answer lies in the fact that they were the leaders of Mitzraim (Egypt), which also has the connotation of being "in the straits"—confined. The very land was conducive to a mindset that constricted and suffocated everything in its midst and snuffed out any vestige of spiritual life.

In Chassidic thought Mitzraim is related to the narrow passage of the neck that occludes the passage of life form the mind to the heart. When one's mind does not have an effect on one's emotions and behavior they shrivel and lose

their personality. They become Pharaohs who have no identities except the identity of the faceless, dull and stubborn tyrant, who has to make a name for himself by self-deification and the subjugation of others.

We can now also appreciate why Pharaoh is so ubiquitous in the Torah.

Pharaoh is the symbol of banality. Pharaoh personifies the force that strips the world of its exciting and unique character and offers it the boring "allure" of Galus. This Galus phenomenon is quotidian and repetitive.

When exposed to the inner soul of life, we see the individuality of each feature. Nothing seems to be a repetition of another. Each feature stands out for its uniqueness. So each time Moses' name is mentioned, we see a different and unique angle of Moses.

In Galus, everything that happens is old and boring. It's like prison life, in which one day is no different from the other.

A person who lives a Geulah-Redemptive life with inwardness and depth will savor each day and each moment. Life becomes a smorgasbord of delightful tastes and a symphony of beautiful music.

Preparing to get Out of Exile

As we stand now at the tail end of the period known as exile and on the verge of crossing over into the period of Redemption, we discover that the last leap is the most difficult because it requires a paradigm shift. We must consider what it is about exile that we don't like and what we want in the Redemption.

To get out of exile we must reject the Pharaoh mindset. We cannot just live by receiving our life support from G-d's "back." That was the mode of exile living. We must learn how to "see" G-d face to face by showing Him and others our own cheerful countenance that dramatizes the deep rooted joy and passion we have for G-d and others. G-d will then shine His light on us and deliver us from the modern day Pharaohs, whatever their name might be.

ESSAY TWO

MIRACLES: ESCAPING THE GALUS FUMES!

Jewish law never included imprisonment as a standard punishment.

If the sanction doesn't bring the criminal to atonement then it is simply punishment for the sake of punishment.

Punishment that actually causes one to degenerate further and fall deeper into the moral abyss and denies the prisoner the opportunity to be productive, coupled with physical pain and suffering, is nothing short of a major crime on the part of the society that condones it!

This is why we must find Galus so intolerable!

ESSAY TWO

MIRACLES: ESCAPING THE GALUS FUMES!

Shortness of Breath and Hard Labor

At the end of last week's parsha, the intolerable Egyptian oppression has gotten worse as a result of Moses' demands of Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go.

When Moses complains of how things deteriorated since he was sent on his mission to Pharaoh, G-d responds by stating that he has heard the cries of the people, as recounted in this week's parsha. G-d then elaborates on the way they will be liberated and uses four different expressions that underscore the glorious and comprehensive nature of their imminent Exodus (for which reason we drink four cups of wine at the Seder).

When Moses reported G-d's words to the Jewish slaves: "They did not listen to Moses due to shortness of breath and hard labor."

When G-d told Moses to speak to Pharaoh again, Moses' argued:

> "If the children of Israel did not listen to me, then how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips!"

Rashi comments that Moses' argument is one of the ten *kal vachomer* inferences mentioned in the Torah. A *kal vachomer* is a logical method of deduction in which we draw inferences from a weaker case and apply it to a stronger case. Rashi explains that Moses was reasoning here: If, because of my speech impediment, the children of Israel, who have everything to gain by listening to me, did not listen to me, Pharaoh, who has everything to lose by listening to me, will surely not listen to me.

Why *didn't* they Listen?

Commentators, however, find it hard to understand Moses' logic in comparing Pharaoh to the children of Israel. The Torah itself explains why the children of Israel would not listen to him; it was due to "shortness of breath and hard labor." This rationale certainly did not apply to Pharaoh!

To answer this question we must start with yet another question raised by Torah commentators.

Why would the children of Israel not listen to Moses? The rationale given by the Torah should have motivated them all the more to listen to Moses. They would surely have

wanted to find some measure of comfort by hearing that G-d promised them that their suffering will come to an end. The Torah doesn't say that they no longer believed Moses because of the increased burden of slavery that resulted from his first encounter with Pharaoh. If that were the case, we could understand why they would not listen to Moses: they ceased to believe that Moses was speaking in the name of G-d. But, the Torah does not say that. It only mentioned the shortness of breath and hard labor, which should have made them even more receptive to Moses' message.

The Anatomy of Galus

To answer these questions we must dissect the anatomy of Galus-exile. The Talmud (*Sukkah* 52b) states that exile is one of four things G-d "regrets." Now it is obvious that G-d does not make mistakes. If He thought that exile is bad for us, why did He create it in the first place? Second, why just exile? Why doesn't the Talmud say that He regrets having created pain and suffering even if they occur outside the venue of exile?

The Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos* volume 24) asks another question: One of the other four things G-d regrets is the *yetzer hara*-the evil inclination. As we say in our prayers the cause of exile is "our sins." Why then mention both

exile and the evil inclination? If the Talmud mentions that G-d regrets the evil inclination which causes us to sin, it no longer has to mention that He also regrets exile which is the consequence of our sins!

The Rebbe teaches us that G-d could have found other forms of punishment to cleanse us of our sins. It did not have to occur through exile. Thus exile is a more profoundly objectionable phenomenon than even pain and suffering.

The question that now begs for an answer is why the pain and suffering experienced in exile is worse than just pain and suffering? And isn't exile, with its attendant oppression and persecution, just another form of suffering?

The answer is that exile is not simply the fact of being driven off our land and forced to live under the rule of other nations. The special pain and suffering of exile is that we are subjected to breathing the spiritually polluted air of exile, which is foreign to our existence and well-being.

When G-d administers pain and suffering it is with the goal that we realize we have gone astray and should return to G-d and His commandments. If it serves that purpose, there can be some justification for the pain and suffering. However, if the pain and suffering does not have the capacity to compel us to introspection and to rectify our

behavior, that pain and suffering is pointless. In truth, it is more than useless; it is cruel!

No to Prison!

This might explain why Jewish law never included imprisonment as a standard punishment. Its only use was to protect society from a type of criminal whose freedom would allow him to commit more crimes.

If the sanction doesn't bring the criminal to atonement then it is simply punishment for the sake of punishment. That would be cruel, and the Torah, which is designated as a Torah of kindness, could not countenance it. Prison, in the overwhelming majority of cases, does not rehabilitate the person; it merely subjects the person to pain and profound alienation from family and society. Punishment that actually causes one to degenerate further and fall deeper into the moral abyss and denies the prisoner the opportunity to be productive, coupled with physical pain and suffering, is nothing short of a major crime on the part of the society that condones it!

Fire!!!

To better understand the odious nature of Galus one can use the following analogy.

One of the most destructive forces in the physical world is fire. When a house is on fire, G-d forbid, the most dangerous aspect of it is not the fire but the fumes it generates. As long as a person trapped in the house remains conscious there are ways, albeit, in some cases extremely difficult, to find an escape route. If, however, the fumes cause the person, who might already be asleep, to descend into an even deeper slumber, it can be deadly.

What makes this threat qualitatively different from all other threats to a person's life is that normally, when a person is confronted with danger, human nature will trigger the person to react; the adrenaline starts flowing and the process of salvation goes into full gear.

When the threat, however, lulls the potential victim into a sense of security and unconsciousness, the danger is greatly magnified. This perilous situation presents a two pronged threat: first, it is directly harmful and second, it robs the person of his ability to take defensive measures.

Galus: Loss of our Defense Mechanism

We can now understand why of the four things the Talmud states that G-d "regrets" the first one mentioned is exile. While there are other ominous threats to our existence, we are still alert to them and have defense mechanisms to counter these threats. Galus is an exception to that rule.

Galus is like the deadly arrow that can pierce the body armor of the victim.

Galus is not just living outside of our homeland; it compels us to breathe unholy air and inhale toxic fumes. Tragically, even those Jews who are fortunate to live in the Land of Israel now are subjected to the "second-hand smoke" emanating from Galus.

This is why the Talmud ranks the undesirability of exile greater than the other regrettable phenomena. While all types of negativity cause us to falter, adversity often possesses a silver lining and can be the greatest motivator for our turning a new leaf and doing good. Not so much exile. Notwithstanding the positive things that emerged from our stay in exile, its negative effects, chiefly its power to put us into a state of spiritual unconsciousness, far outweighs its benefits. We therefore implore G-d, at least thrice daily, to bring an end to the exile that He Himself "regretted" having created.

Moses' Argument Reexamined

We can now understand why the children of Israel were not receptive to Moses' relaying to them the promise of Redemption. They were so overcome by the fumes of exile that they couldn't do what was necessary to get out of it. Had they been subjected to any other form of suffering they would have been keen to hear about their salvation.

The spiritual effects of Galus are pernicious. They desensitize the victim to the point of numbness.

Moses thus argues that if the children of Israel, who possess a sensitive soul bequeathed by their Patriarchs and Matriarchs, have become so anesthetized, how much more so the pagan Pharaoh, who epitomized the Galus mentality; indeed, he was its very embodiment, he could not be receptive.

G-d, however, did not accept Moses' argument. Instead He started the process of miracles and plagues. These were not intended simply as punishments for the Egyptians; these miracles rather represented G-d's "blowing" in new and purified air into the atmosphere and driving away the toxic fumes of exile. As a result the Jewish people became more sensitive to the energy of Redemption. Even Pharaoh, had G-d not hardened his heart, would have been more receptive.

The Purifying Effects of Miracles

We are living, as the Rebbe taught us, on the very cusp of Redemption. While the world is still living in a toxic environment, physically and spiritually, the Jewish people have received tremendous miracles particularly in the last few decades. The Rebbe emphasized our need to rejoice in, and publicize, these miracles, which are G-d's instrument of

purifying the atmosphere of the desensitizing effects of Galus and introduce the healthy and life-sustaining air of Redemption.

ESSAY THREE

WHO WILL BE THE AARON'S OF OUR GENERATION?

As long as the Jewish people believed that Moses was sent by G-d to liberate them, there was no need to perform miracles for Pharaoh.

Their faith was so powerful that it could "infect" everybody.

The key to Moses' success in touching Pharaoh's cruel heart was the faith of the people.

When G-d told him that the people would believe that was sufficient for the success of Moses' mission.

ESSAY THREE

WHO WILL BE THE AARON'S OF OUR GENERATION?

The Debate Between G-d and Moses

In last week's parsha the Torah recorded G-d's lengthy entreaty to Moses that he be the one to liberate the Jews from Egypt. Moses at first demurs. One of his arguments was that he has a speech impediment. In Moses' words: "for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue."

G-d refutes his argument by telling him:

> "Who gave man a mouth... is it not I, G-d? So now go, I will be with your mouth, and I will teach you what to say."

Moses was still not willing to go. He asks G-d to send someone else. According to Rashi he meant his brother Aaron. G-d responds to that proposal by saying that Aaron will be happy that Moses was chosen and that G-d will put the right words in Moses' and Aaron's mouths.

The parsha ends with Moses going to Pharaoh and demanding that he let the people go so that they may serve their G-d. Pharaoh responds by making the already unbearable situation even worse, whereupon Moses protests to G-d for having sent him.

This week's parsha picks up where the last one left off. G-d rebukes Moses for questioning Him and then proceeds to give Moses the mission of telling the people that they will be liberated. The people, however, did not listen to Moses because of the new and harsher circumstances: "They did not listen to Moses "due to shortness of breath and hard labor."

Moses then argues:

> "If the children of Israel did not listen to me, then how will Pharaoh listen to me? I have sealed lips."

Why does Moses use the Same Discredited Argument?

G-d then instructs Moses to use Aaron as his interpreter and proceed to display miracles to Pharaoh.

There are several glaring questions that arise when we compare the content of last week's parsha with this week's parsha:

Moses already used the argument that he had a speech impediment, and G-d refuted it by saying that He will be with Moses and instruct him.

Three More Questions

Another salient difference between G-d commission to Moses in last week's parsha as compared with His instructions to him in this week's parsha:

In last week's parsha G-d does not appoint Aaron to be Moses' interpreter for Pharaoh. G-d merely tells Moses that Aaron would assist him in delivering the message to the people. Nothing is said about him being the one to transmit Moses' words to Pharaoh. And even that role given to Aaron came only after Moses told G-d that he should send Aaron instead.

Yet in this week's parsha, G-d tells him to appoint Aaron to be his interpreter for Pharaoh specifically.

The questions therefore are:

First, why did Moses bring up his original "discredited" argument about his speech disability when G-d already refuted it in last week's parsha?

Second, why did G-d not appoint Aaron to be his interpreter for Pharaoh in the first place? Why did He wait for Moses to once again invoke his speech impediment in

this week's parsha to assign this new role of interpreter to Aaron?

Third, why did G-d not tell Moses to perform the miracles for Pharaoh in last week's parsha? G-d only told him to perform these miracles for the Jewish people, but not for Pharaoh. In this week's parsha, G-d tell Moses and Aaron to perform the miracle of the staff turning into a serpent followed by the Ten Plagues?

Fourth, when Moses mentions his disability in last week's parsha he refers to himself as being "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue." Yet in this week's parsha he describes himself as one who has "sealed lips." What's the difference between "heavy of mouth and tongue" and "sealed lips?" And, why the change of language?

The State of the Jewish People

The answer to all these questions perhaps lies in the state of the Jewish people before Moses went to Pharaoh and their mindset after he was spurned by Pharaoh and the exile was made more pernicious.

As long as the Jewish people believed that Moses was sent by G-d to liberate them, there was no need to perform miracles for Pharaoh. Their faith was so powerful that it could "infect" everybody. The key to Moses' success in

touching Pharaoh's cruel heart was the faith of the people. When G-d told him that the people would believe that was sufficient for the success of Moses' mission.

Jewish Faith takes place of Oratory

When a Jew is filled with conviction and faith, the Pharaoh's of the world hear them loudly and clearly even if their speech is inchoate and garbled. They do not have to be endowed with oratorical skills. Words suffused with pure faith and profound conviction in G-d and in His mission, suffice to penetrate the heart of even the most cruel tyrant.

At that juncture, Moses did not really need Aaron to be his interpreter. Aaron's role as Moses' accomplice was only intended to accommodate Moses' request that Aaron be chosen as the liberator. Moses, his speech impediment notwithstanding, would be able to get the message through to Pharaoh despite his physical disability, with or without Aaron. Moses did not need an interpreter and did not need to perform any miracles for Pharaoh because he had the power of the faith of the Jewish people whom he was representing.

But when Moses' saw how his words backfired and had actually exacerbated the already intolerable plight of his brethren, Moses blamed himself for his failure to convey

the divine message in an untainted fashion. "Obviously," Moses must have concluded, "if the message is G-dly and the people who I am representing are pure in their faith, the fault must be with me, the messenger." Moses, therefore "complained" to G-d by saying, "why did you send **me?"**

Moses' Impairment

Now in this week's parsha, when G-d tells him to go again to Pharaoh, Moses' reaction is even stronger and his argument buttressed. His argument was thus: If the Jewish people were no longer filled with the same degree of receptivity to the message of Redemption and were not responsive to his words, how will Pharaoh listen to me?

Moses meant by this that if his impaired speech had any power it can only be because of the faith of the people he is representing that is channeled through him. But if the people are no longer generating the energy to him though their faith, he was now doubly impaired:

The first impairment was based on Moses' humble perception, that his physical impediment mirrored his spiritual shortcoming. But, now there was an additional factor that did not exist before: The fact that the people he represented were no longer imbued with the same intense faith and were no longer channeling their convictions to

him meant that he was now totally incapable of getting through to Pharaoh. His power base was compromised and, in his own mind, he himself lacked even the most rudimentary communication skills.

Moses thus employs a much stronger term to describe his speech impediment. Whereas in last week's parsha he characterizes his disability as being "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue,"—heavy but not sealed—in this week's parsha he describes himself as having "sealed lips." This implied that he felt that he was now totally incapable of transmitting any meaningful message.

Moses' Mission Tweaked

G-d therefore "tweaks" the nature of the mission. Now Aaron was going to be the main speaker to Pharaoh. In addition, they will henceforth perform miracles to compensate for the lack of overt faith by the people.

True Moses is still the main liberator, for only the humble Moses was the transparent soul, who could channel G-d's words unfiltered and untainted, but now Moses' power will be channeled through Aaron.

We Influence our Leaders

The lesson from the above is that even Moses' ability to communicate and liberate was influenced and affected by the faith of the nation. It is the nation that gives their leader the power to lead and liberate.

The power that we give our leaders is based on a Torah principle that "there is no king without a nation." Without the nation's acceptance of their leader as their leader; without the people embracing of their leader's, the leader's abilities are also compromised.

Thus, it was the Jewish people's faith in the words of Moses their leader that empowered him to have his words penetrate Pharaoh's heart.

What is true about every leader from Moses' onward is especially true of the relationship between the people and Moshiach, the final leader and redeemer. The Ba'al Shem Tov states that each and every Jew possesses a spark of Moshiach. If our spark is strong it empowers Moshiach to actualize his Messianic potential and execute his role as the redeemer of the Jewish people.

If there is a weakness in the faith of the people because of the harsh conditions of exile, there are two alternatives:

The first is to find the right people to be the Aaron's who bring Moshiach's message to the people. Aaron's ability to

open the hearts of the people is due to the closeness of Aaron to the people. While Moses is referred to as the "escort of the King" meaning that he was G-d's "representative" to the people, Aaron is the "escort of the queen," he is the representative of the people to G-d. Aaron, though he "merely" interpreted Moses' words and received his power from him, had the advantage that he was closer to the people than Moses and was therefore able to reach into them and expose their true faith.

We are the Aarons

In our generation that was declared by the Rebbe to be the "last generation of exile and the first of the Redemption," it is our task to be the Aarons to bring Moshiach's message to the world and thereby inspire the entire world with the message of Moshiach's imminent arrival to usher in the final, complete and permanent Redemption.

Our generation is also witness to unprecedented miracles. The most notable arguably—although, we take it for granted—is the freedom for millions of Soviet Jews. No generation has seen so many miracles in their own personal lives as we have seen. These displays of G-dly power coupled with fulfilling our role as "Aarons" should serve to strengthen our faith in the coming of Moshiach. Our strengthened faith, in turn, will further enhance the

effectiveness of the "Aarons" of the world and ultimately strengthen the hands of Moshiach to rid the world of its "Pharaohs" and all of that which is undesirable, and usher in the age which Maimonides—whose yahrtzeit we will be observing this week, on the 20th of Teves—describes in the end of his monumental work, Mishneh Torah, citing the prophet Isaiah:

> "The entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d's as the seabed is covered with water."

ESSAY FOUR

STAFF EATS STAFF

For education to be worthy of its name the teacher, mentor, parent et al. must employ tough love on occasion.

However, the way we administer this love can make the difference between success and failure.

It can determine whether the student will have a future or will his or her potential forever remain untapped because of a bad experience with an "educator."

ESSAY FOUR

STAFF EATS STAFF

Staffs into Serpents

When G-d sent Moses to Pharaoh, the first sign he was to use to demonstrate G-d's power was the throwing of Aaron's staff before Pharaoh, which then turned into a serpent. The Egyptian sorcerers then replicated his wonder. Afterwards, Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.

If G-d's intent was to merely impress Pharaoh that Moses had supernatural powers, there were many other miracles he could have performed. Why the conversion of a staff into a snake and then having his staff swallow up the Egyptian ones? And why was this prelude to the Ten Plagues that followed?

An Educational Process

In truth, all of the ten plagues were not just instruments of punishment, but a means to crush the evil of Egypt. Indeed,

the Jewish view of punishment in general is that it is a means to an end. The end is rehabilitation. Hence, the ten plagues were essentially an educational process that consisted of ten steps, or ten specific lessons.

Accordingly, the miracle of the staff-turning-into-a-snake served as a general introduction to the whole process of educating the Egyptians.

Internalizing the Exodus

Since we are required to internalize the process of the Exodus every day, it follows that we must apply the ten plagues to our own internal "Egypt." Moreover, prior to applying the "Ten Plague therapy" we must preface the lesson from the staff-snake miracle.

Thus, for us to experience true freedom and to literally bring about the final Redemption, we must first and foremost apply the lesson of the staff turned into a snake.

The Rebbe's View on Education

The following is adapted from the works of the Rebbe in which a fundamental lesson is derived for those who are entrusted with educating others.

For education to be worthy of its name the teacher,

mentor, parent et al. must employ tough love on occasion. However, the way we administer this love can make the difference between success and failure. It can determine whether the student will have a future or will his or her potential forever remain untapped because of a bad experience with an "educator."

Begin with Positive Energy

When we approach another who needs our guidance, Jewish law demands that we begin with and accentuate the positive approach. With soothing and loving words, we can accomplish much more than with harsh and stinging words of recrimination. This is known as the approach of Aaron who "Loved peace, pursued peace, loved every creature and drew them close to the Torah." (Ethics of the Fathers)

Unfortunately, there are times when the approach of "tough love" is required. There are people who are so covered with "steel armor" that makes them impregnable. They are impervious to any positive influences and they are resistant to our positive approach.

Piercing their Armor with Aaron's Staff

There is only one way of getting through to them. And that is by shattering their shell and piercing their armor. In

Hebrew terminology this is the process of "*beliah*-swallowing" the others resistant ego.

This then is the significance of Aaron's staff swallowing up the staffs of the Egyptians. When a person is compelled to use the method of "tough love" and shatter the inflated ego of the person who is need of therapy, it must be done with "**Aaron's** staff; the staff of a person whose sole motivation is love and absolute concern for the good of the person he is admonishing.

Staff Eats Staff

There is still another powerful lesson in the narrative of Aaron's staff that swallowed the Egyptian staffs. As our sages point out, it was Aaron's staff that swallowed up the Egyptian staffs and not his snake. Only after his snake (that had originally been a staff) reverted to being a staff, did it swallow the Egyptian's staffs.

The lesson in this, states the Rebbe, is that when one is compelled to discipline another it does not suffice for the *motivation* alone to be love. The disciplining procedure itself — while not overtly loving — cannot be laden with emotion of anger and hostility. Rather, one must act like a "staff" that is devoid of emotion and sense of ego. To shatter another person's inflated ego, it is important that it not be done with a feeling of ego and need to dominate

over others.

With this introduction, one can then proceed to administer "Ten Plague Therapy" that enables us to pierce through the obstacles that stand in the way of our spiritual freedom and our realization of the ultimate Redemption through Moshiach.

ESSAY FIVE

THE BIRD OF KNOWLEDGE

Galus is punctuated with pain, suffering, discord, strife and concealment of G-d's presence.

On the other hand, Galus has provided us with the greatest opportunity to accomplish what we could not when we lived in the Land of Israel beside our Beis Hamikdash.

The suffering in Galus has exposed and refined our most powerful soul-powers. The self-sacrifice and dedication that so many thousands of Jews have exhibited in the darkness of Galus requires us to put Galus itself on a pedestal.

ESSAY FIVE

THE BIRD OF KNOWLEDGE

The Lone Frog

The second of the 10 plagues was "frogs." Frogs spread throughout the entire land of Egypt and into every nook and cranny. Yet, oddly, the Torah describes this plague in the singular: "And the *tzfarde'ah* [the frog] came up."

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 67b) addresses this issue:

> Rabbi Akiva said that a single frog came out. It caused a swarm which spread throughout the entire land of Egypt. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said to him, "Akiva, what do you have to do with Aggadah [the non-legal part of the Torah]? Cease your discourses [with Aggadah] and go to [the study of the intricacies of] *Nega'im* [the laws of the person afflicted with a skin disease known as *tzara'as*] and *Oholos* [the laws that concern impurity contracted by being under the same roof as a corpse]. There was one frog, it

> croaked [or: whistled] to them [the other frogs] and they came."

We thus have two versions of how one frog became many frogs: either they were spawned off the original frog (according to the Midrash it was caused by the Egyptians striking it), or the first frog simply summoned all the other frogs.

There are several intriguing questions that must be resolved in this matter.

First, why did the plague come in this fashion, where one frog caused a multitude of frogs to afflict the Egyptians, whether they came one way or the other?

Second, what is the real crux of the dispute between Rabbis Akiva and Elazar ben Azarya? Does it really make a difference whether they spawned from the first frog or were gathered together from other places? Either way, they were a plague of frogs.

Third, what did Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya mean when he told Rabbi Akiva to devote himself to studying the tractates *Nega'im* and *Oholos*? Rashi explains that Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya meant that since Aggadah was not Rabbi Akiva's Talmudic specialty, he should occupy himself with the intricacies and complexities of Jewish law in those two tractates. That may well have been the surface meaning of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's comments. It is our task,

however, to understand what deeper message was contained in this exchange with Rabbi Akiva.

Weighty and Trivial

Another passage in the Talmud may shed some light on this exchange between Rabbis Elazar ben Azarya and Akiva. The Talmud (*Pesachim* 50a) cites a verse of the prophet *Zecharya* describing the future Messianic Age: "It will be on that day, there will be no light, *yikaros* and *kipa'on*." The Talmud clarifies these two enigmatic words by stating that they refer to the tractates *Nega'im* and *Oholos* which are *yikaros*-weighty in this world, but will be *kipa'on*-trivial in the world to come.

From this passage in the Talmud we see that the tractates *Nega'im* and *Oholos* represent the difficulty and complexity of these laws in the present day and age.

Why makes these laws so difficult?

Paradox

As we shall see, these two subjects are both metaphors for Galus, the ultimate manifestation of difficulty. *Nega'im* and *Oholos* are paradoxical subjects just as Galus is a paradox. On the one hand, Galus is punctuated with pain, suffering, discord, strife and concealment of G-d's presence. It is such

a malign curse that, the Talmud states (*Sukkah* 52b), even G-d says He regrets having created it. Obviously, G-d doesn't experience regret in the same fashion as humans. Rather, the Talmud wishes to underscore with this terminology the profound negativity that is Galus.

On the other hand, Galus has provided us with the greatest opportunity to accomplish what we could not when we lived in the Land of Israel beside our Beis Hamikdash. The suffering in Galus has exposed and refined our most powerful soul-powers. The self-sacrifice and dedication that so many thousands of Jews have exhibited in the darkness of Galus requires us to put Galus itself on a pedestal.

Moreover, according to the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus, Galus possesses a hidden dimension of G-dly energy that we cannot access until the time of *Geulah*-Redemption. And precisely because these inaccessible energies are so powerful and elusive, they manifest themselves in negative ways. Redemption is, therefore, not a repudiation of exile but rather the actualization of its latent powers; we will then be able to internalize and wield these powerful energies in a totally positive fashion.

The subject of *Nega'im* is thus a metaphor for Galus because it too is paradoxical. The impurity that one contracts when afflicted with the *tzara'as* skin lesion is a

result of the blocked sublime spiritual energy that is forced to manifest itself on the surface as a negative phenomenon.

Likewise, the law of impurity due to contact with a corpse is an enigma and a paradox reflective of the very paradox of Galus. A dead body is considered the source of the most severe form of impurity (simply being under the same roof as a corpse causes impurity, which is the subject of the tractate *Oholos*). The paradox here is that, according to the Midrash, a dead body itself is not impure, especially of that of a righteous person whose body was the instrument of fulfilling G-d's will. Yet, ironically, it confers the most severe form of impurity on the person who comes into even casual contact with it. In the days of the Temple, one who had become impure would have to go through the ritual of the Red Heifer which involved its own paradox: while the mixture of water and ashes purifies the impure, the people involved in preparing the purifying mixture became contaminated themselves.

All of this points to the enigma of exile. While we have become "contaminated" by the concealment of G-d's presence, G-d nevertheless declares that He dwells with us even in our present state of impurity. We are simultaneously estranged from Him and His G-dly purity even as we can never truly be detached from Him.

During Galus we've exhibited the worst possible traits and experienced our greatest failures, even as we have achieved the greatest of feats and demonstrated unparalleled super-human capabilities.

Two Models of Preparation for Redemption

Let us now return to the exchange between Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya and Rabbi Akiva concerning the way the lone frog multiplied.

Frog, in Hebrew, is *tzfarde'ah. Chasam Sofer* explains that the word itself alludes to Moses and the future Redemption. The first part of the word, *tfzar*, means morning or tomorrow while "*de'ah*" means knowledge. The *tzfarde'ah* is a portent both of the future Redemption and the one who is responsible for its happening.

Alternatively, the word *tzfarde'ah*, as the Midrash states, is a compounding of the words *tzipor*-a bird and *de'ah* - knowledge. According to the Talmud, a bird is a symbol of peace, and when it is joined with *de'ah* – knowledge, the resulting word alludes to that elevated peace, based on the knowledge of G-d, which will pervade all of humanity in the Messianic Age. As Maimonides writes, in this Age there will be no more hatred and jealousy because the knowledge of G-d will spread throughout the world. The

word *tzippor* also has the same *gematria* value as the phrase *zeh Moshiach*-This is Moshiach!

This, then, may be the deeper meaning of the dialogue between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya.

When G-d brought the plagues on the Egyptians, He did so not just to punish them. The objective was also to teach them about G-d and set into motion the dynamic of Redemption. The *tzfarde'ah* symbolizes the announcement to the world that it is about to undergo a major paradigm shift. Initially this announcement starts off as a lone voice. According to Rabbi Akiva, the *tzfarde'ah* proliferates and spreads out the message by sending out many small *tzfardi'im* as its emissaries bearing the message of Redemption to the world. In Rabbi Akiva's formulation, the process of Redemption comes from outside the Galus dynamic and imposes itself on the Galus.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya responds to Rabbi Akiva's approach by asserting that the preparation for Redemption can come from within the Galus itself. He thus tells Rabbi Akiva to focus on the mystical dynamic of *Nega'im* and *Oholos*. Here we see that Galus itself has the innate potential to change. The little "frogs"—or sparks of Redemption—can come from all over because every part of creation, particularly every Jew, is a miniature *tzfarde'ah*, with a spark of Moshiach in him or her. All that is

necessary is for the "lone frog" to whistle, and the world, of its own volition, will be receptive to Redemption. Indeed, the term "whistling," used here to describe the summons by the lone *tzfarde'ah,* is related to a similar word used in relation to the Redemption: "I will whistle for them and gather them" (*Zecharya* 10:8.)

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's concept is based on the notion that Galus is the ultimate paradox and contains within itself the seeds and dynamic of Redemption. The entire world will be galvanized to join in the chorus for Redemption.

Both Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya are correct. Redemption involves both processes. The Moshiach of the generation inspires his emissaries to spread the knowledge of G-d to prepare us for and actually bring on the Redemption. This approach, however, puts the onus on Moshiach and his extensions. The other approach extends the responsibility to everyone because the exile itself gets closer to realizing its inner dynamic. Everybody is therefore empowered to unleash the Redemptive forces embedded within Galus. All Moshiach has to do is "whistle" and everyone is gathered.

In Our Hands!

The Rebbe in his historic talk (28th of Nissan 5752) stated that he has done all he can to bring Moshiach. Now, the Rebbe says, he is giving it over to all of us. We are empowered with the ability to transform the world and prepare it for the Redemption. The Rebbe's exhortation follows Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's formula of the *tzfarde'ah's* role: to inspire everyone to be part of the process of bringing on the Redemption.

ESSAY SIX

SEVENTH GENERATION SENSITIVITY

We are living in the most refined generation of history!

Thousands of years of collective observance of the Mitzvos, and Torah study practiced with incredible self-sacrifice, have rendered the spiritual air far more pure and holy. By this reckoning, we are the most suitable generation in history to welcome Moshiach.

Our problem today is not a dearth of inner spirituality; it is the incredible proliferation of "idols" that permeate our society and impinge on our ability to express our profound and unprecedented spiritual energy. When we are able to leave the "city" and distance ourselves from these idols, we can discover how spiritual and G-dly we really are.

ESSAY SIX

SEVENTH GENERATION SENSITIVITY

Ten Plague Therapy

The Ten Plagues have traditionally been understood as G-d's way of punishing Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their enslavement of the Jews. However, if that was the only objective, then why did G-d have to stretch it out, plague after plague, until there were Ten Plagues in all? Why didn't He just bring one devastating and convincing plague to punish the Egyptians and compel them to liberate the Jewish people?

The truth is that the experience of the Ten Plagues had at least two other interconnected functions:

First, it was designed to educate the Egyptians (and the Jewish people) about G-d's existence and His involvement in and power over this world; these major principles of Judaism were previously unknown to the Egyptians.

Education, by definition, cannot happen instantaneously. The process of education is like the process of growing a plant. One must first plow, sow, water and remove the

weeds, etc. There is no shortcut to genuine growth and development.

On the spiritual level, education is what allows ideals and beliefs that are above and beyond a person to enter into that person's entire intellectual and emotional structure. And since our souls are comprised of Ten Faculties (three intellectual and seven emotional, as discussed in Kabbalah and Chassidic literature), the "Ten Plague educational program" was an effective ten step program to infiltrate and alter the totality of the people affected.

Sensitivity Training

The second function of the Ten Plagues, as a corollary of the first, was to refine the Egyptian people and sensitize them to the suffering and pain of the Jews whom they had enslaved and persecuted for so many years. Knowledge gained through education shapes and molds our sensitivity to G-d and to others.

If the Ten Plagues fell short of completely transforming the Egyptians, they are still able to convey eternal messages to us today and prepare us for the Final Redemption. The prophet Micah illustrates their close connection when he compares the Final Redemption to the Exodus from Egypt.

Prayer and Idolatry

With this introduction in mind, we can examine Rashi's comment concerning Moses' mode of prayer after the seventh plague, hail. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said to them,

> I have sinned this time. G-d is the righteous One. I and my people are the wicked ones. Plead with G-d... I will send you away, and you shall not continue to remain.

Moses response to Pharaoh was:

> When I leave the city, I will spread my hands to G-d. The thunder will cease... in order that you should know that the land belongs to G-d...

Rashi, citing the Midrash, notes the words "When I leave the city, I will raise my hands to G-d" and addresses why Moses had to leave the city to pray: "He did not pray in the city because it was filled with idols."

Commentators are puzzled why, in some of the earlier plagues, Moses did not leave the city to pray to G-d. Why, specifically, was it during the plague of hail that Moses found it necessary to avoid praying in the presence of idols?

Some commentators suggest that the difference lies in the manner of prayer Moses engaged in. When he prayed for

the removal of the frogs and the mixture of the wild animals he cried out to G-d or implored G-d. However, with respect to the removal of the plague of hail, the Torah says that he "spread his hands to G-d." This more intense form of prayer could not be performed in the vicinity of idols.

However, this explanation itself needs to be clarified. Why did Moses change his manner of prayer with regard to this plague in particular?

Flailing but not Failing

Bearing in mind our introductory comments about the Ten Plague educational program, we can shed some light on the above.

If the purpose of the Ten Plagues was to educate and sensitize Pharaoh and his people about G-d's role and the pain they inflicted on the Jewish people, the question arises, what grade did Pharaoh receive? Did he fail the course?

When we survey Pharaoh's responses to the six prior plagues, we find that he remained essentially the same stiff-necked disbeliever. The point at which the educational program began to make a dent and affect Pharaoh was with the plague of hail. His response to this plague was: "I

have sinned this time. G-d is the righteous One. I and my people are the wicked ones…"

Not only was Pharaoh willing to relent and let the Jews go, he admitted being the guilty party and that G-d was righteous. This sounds very much like a repentant sinner. True, Moses concludes with the words "I know that you and your servants still do not fear G-d." But Pharaoh deserved some credit. Indeed, Moses was saying, in effect, "You haven't failed, for some progress has been made, but you still have not gotten the grades G-d desires of you.

In other words, the plagues were finally beginning to show their intended effect. The Egyptians were becoming somewhat sensitized to G-d's existence, His role and the pain they had inflicted. The world was a more G-dly receptive place.

Cleaner Air

Now we can begin to understand why, after the seventh plague of hail, it was difficult for Moses to remain in a city filled with idols to pray.

Why hadn't these idols been an impediment to his prayers with the preceding six plagues? Previously, the atmosphere of Egypt was inhospitable for anything G-dly. Whether or not there was an idol nearby made little difference. The

entire Land of Egypt was saturated with impure energy. And it made no difference where Moses stood to pray. The entire country was one idolatrous cesspool!

When, however, Pharaoh started a process of Teshuvah-repentance and acknowledged G-d and his own sin, the air subtly became more refined. Now, Moses was able to sense the idolatrous atmosphere of the city, which was antithetical to G-d's presence, and sought to connect to G-d in prayer in a more sanitized area.

On a deeper level, the more we have been refined, the more sensitive and "allergic" we become to evil. As Egypt became more refined, it created a greater sensitivity and reaction to the idols. Previously, their presence did not seem to pose a problem. However, when the degree of impurity was lessened and the environment became more receptive to G-d, idolatry concomitantly became more of an impediment. The more one is sensitized to G-dly truth, the more one will be disturbed by untoward and impure influences.

Moses Elevated

A question still remains. Why was **Moses**, the world's most spiritual person, able to pray in the presence of idols up until the seventh plague? And why did his mode of prayer

change and intensify, as manifested by his stretched hands, in step with the gradual elevation of Pharaoh and Egypt?

Our Sages state, "A leader is for the generation." If the generation is corrupt, it creates a cloud around their leader and makes it harder for him to reveal his full measure of spiritual energy. If the generation is meritorious, its leader's radiance will shine.

A primary example of this mutual dynamic is G-d's telling Moses to "descend" from the mountain when the people worshipped the Golden Calf. This, Rashi stated, was G-d's way of saying to Moses that you too have been diminished by virtue of the degradation of your flock.

By G-d telling Moses that he was diminished, His intention was not to berate Moses, G-d forbid. Instead G-d's rebuke of Moses meant that he would have to work harder and generate even deeper soul powers. Until then, he could not help rehabilitate the fallen stature of the Jewish nation and upgrade the dynamic of a people who had become more resistant to G-d.

We can apply the above analysis to the seventh plague. As the Egyptians became more receptive to G-d, so too did Moses' spiritual stature increase. Even the greatest of Jews could discover new vistas and enjoy greater sensitivity and awareness from the progress made by the people his mission was to inspire.

At this point, Moses can sense the all-so-subtle change in the prevailing atmosphere. He can now allow himself to pray on a higher, more sophisticated level, symbolized by his outstretched hands.

Seventh Generation Sensitivity

We are living in the most refined generation of history!

This statement may appear to be counterintuitive. It is based on the premise that thousands of years of collective observance of the Mitzvos, and Torah study practiced with incredible self-sacrifice, have rendered the spiritual air far more pure and holy. By this reckoning, we are the most suitable generation in history to welcome Moshiach.

Our problem today is not a dearth of inner spirituality; it is the incredible proliferation of "idols" that permeate our society and impinge on our ability to express our profound and unprecedented spiritual energy. When we are able to leave the "city" and distance ourselves from these idols, we can discover how spiritual and G-dly we really are.

In the past, the world was much less refined. It had not yet accumulated the energy we have today and the "idols" permeated **all** of society. Our potential and our prayers then were much more limited. But today we have reached

the positive milestone of the "seventh plague," i.e., the seventh degree of education and sensitivity.

It may be suggested that this seventh degree of education parallels the seventh generation of leadership from the Alter Rebbe, who set into motion the teachings of Chassidus, through our Rebbe. As the Midrash tells us: "All sevens are beloved." Moses was in the seventh generation from Abraham and he liberated us from Egyptian exile. So too, our generation will be the generation of the Final Redemption. Sevens possess an uncanny ability to sanctify and liberate. With our enhanced status, we can now "stretch out our hands" to G-d and successfully demand of Him to bring the Final Redemption through Moshiach.

One of the ways Moshiach is identified by the Talmud is that he suffers from *tzara'as*, a skin disorder. In the case of Moshiach, tzara'as is an "allergic" reaction to Galus and its evil. This is emblematic of our generation, the most spiritually sensitive of all, and which is more than ready to enter into the Final Redemption.

(See Essay Twenty-One for an alternate approach)

ESSAY SEVEN

ACKNOWLEDGMENT FIRST STEP TO FREEDOM

The instrument we need for Moshiach is acknowledging what goes on in our lives.

Acknowledging leads to appreciation.

This is what preparing for Moshiach entails.

Opening our eyes to see the cataclysmic events that have occurred, as well as the more subtle changes that are happening.

To become sensitive to all that is going on will help us in achieving our own Exodus from exile into the world of Redemption.

ESSAY SEVEN

ACKNOWLEDGMENT FIRST STEP TO FREEDOM

Teachable Moments

The Ten Plagues were the means by which G-d gradually got the Egyptians to release their stranglehold on the Jewish nation.

If the A-mighty had so desired, He could have simply wiped out the Egyptians in one fell swoop. There was no need to prolong the agony on either side. The Jewish People—or the "Israelites" as they were then called—did not have to spend an extra year (the time, our Sages state, it took from the first plague until their liberation), to witness the way G-d inflicted pain and misery on their tormenters. We may presume that they would have preferred to be free one year earlier.

Yet G-d chose to strike the Egyptians with the Ten Plagues so that they—and we—would learn certain lessons about life that will enable us to free ourselves from all that gets

in the way of enjoying our freedom.

In other words, while physical freedom is a cherished ideal, it will not be all that it is cracked up to be if we remain in an internal prison. If we cannot free ourselves from our bad habits, for example, we cannot truly be free.

Viewing the Ten Plagues in this light we must view them as ways of ridding ourselves of some of the things that limit us emotionally and spiritually.

Teaching Not Taking things for Granted

The first plague was blood. All of the waterways of the Egyptians turned into blood.

Water was the source of life for the Egyptians. All of their food was produced with the water that came from the Nile through the man-made irrigation canals.

It is interesting that the Torah relates how the Egyptians had to dig new wells because all the existing supplies of water were contaminated.

The question arises, if G-d's intention was to deprive them of water, why did the new supply of water not turn into blood?

A second question may be raised. If the point of the plague was to impress upon them G-d's might, it was a failure.

First, the Egyptian magicians were able to replicate this plague. Second, with some additional effort on their part, they were able to find new supplies of water.

The simple explanation is that G-d did not want them to suffer inordinately for the first plague. There was a gradual increase in the pain inflicted on them from plague to plague.

Thus, G-d just made it extremely difficult for them to obtain clear water. He did not want to deprive them entirely of their water.

On a deeper level, we might suggest, G-d's intention was to point to a common human failure; of taking things for granted.

Before we can teach someone **whom** to thank and credit, we have to teach them how to recognize that there is indeed a need not to take things for granted.

Egyptians built an intricate system of irrigation canals. Since they were so accustomed to utilizing this system, they were no longer even grateful to their forebears for having provided them with a means of sustenance. So if they could not even get themselves to appreciate their parent's and grandparent's efforts, how could one have expected them to recognize G-d's role in their lives?

Therefore, the first plague forced them to realize that

producing water is not a simple feat. It takes much energy and effort. Now that they were able to appreciate that things do not just happen, they were ready to discover the ultimate Source of everything.

Acknowledging Leads to Appreciation.

As we approach the ultimate period of Redemption—that has been compared in the Prophetic writings to the Exodus from Egypt—we must go through several stages of development for us to appreciate the need for the Messianic Age.

The Messianic Age is more than a time of goodness and peace. It is first and foremost a time when we will recognize the ultimate source of existence. We will really appreciate G-d's role in our lives. But, even before we realize that goal, we must try to develop the sense of appreciation period.

By way of analogy: before one could use an instrument to perform a certain function, one must first check to see whether the instrument is in working order.

The instrument we need for Moshiach is acknowledging what goes on in our lives. Acknowledging leads to appreciation. When we cease to take things for granted and appreciate everything that we have and all that occurs in

our life, we can then say that our "instrument" is in functioning order. At that point we then get to use the instrument for its intended and ultimate purpose: recognizing the all-encompassing role G-d plays in our own lives.

This is what preparing for Moshiach entails. Opening our eyes to see what is going on around us. We cannot be oblivious to the cataclysmic events that have occurred, nor should we ignore the more subtle changes that are happening. To become sensitive to all that is going on will help us in achieving our own Exodus from exile into the world of Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHT

UNCIRCUMCISED LIPS

When Moses saw how he was not getting through to the Children of Israel, he attributed this to his own spiritual deficiency.

Moses was convinced that it was his fault—due to his "uncircumcised lips;" or a lack of sincerity.

G-d, however, assured Moses that he would succeed.

ESSAY EIGHT

UNCIRCUMCISED LIPS

Why Sue the Old Argument?

Moses was once again commanded by G-d to speak to Pharaoh that he let the Jews leave his country. Strangely enough, Moses demurs. The reason for his hesitation is summed up in one sentence:

> "If the children of Israel did not listen to me then how will Pharaoh listen to me, and I am a man with a speech impediment (literally: uncircumcised lips.)"

Commentators raise the question: When Moses was first asked by G-d to be the liberator of the Jews, at the burning bush, Moses used the same argument that he had a speech impediment. Yet G-d assured him that he would succeed and that Aaron would be his spokesman. Why did he now bring up the same argument?

Uncircumcised Lips?

The key to answering this question lies in contrasting the

terminology Moses used in this week's parsha with the terminology he used above. Earlier, at the burning bush, Moses speaks of himself being "slow of speech and slow of tongue." In this week's parsha, however, Moses describes his speech impediment in terms of "uncircumcised lips." Why the change?

Upon deeper reflection, one may suggest that the speech impediments of which Moses spoke were twofold and that there is a difference between being "slow of tongue" and having "uncircumcised lips." The former impediment is physical in nature, while the latter is expressive of a spiritual defect.

Initially, when G-d asked Moses to speak to Pharaoh and the Israelites, he humbly submitted to G-d that he lacked the **physical** ability to speak clearly and eloquently. "Why choose me," was Moses complaint, when there were other more competent speakers.

However, when G-d told him that Aaron could be his spokesman, Moses could no longer protest. Aaron would do the talking and Moses was convinced that Aaron would be effective.

However, in this week's parsha, after Moses speaks to the Israelites and they were not able to listen to him, he was concerned that there was a more serious problem than just having a physical speech impediment. Moses was now

concerned that he lacked more than just clarity and eloquence in his speech. In his humility, he imagined that he lacked the very ability to touch other people and to move them. Moses' speaking of "uncircumcised lips," did not refer to his physical handicap—for that was remedied by having Aaron do the talking—but rather to his inability to pierce through their resistance. Moses felt his words were dry and uninspiring and could therefore not penetrate.

"Words that Emanate from the Heart, Enter the Heart"

To understand this point, we must make reference to the famous pronouncement of our Sages:

> "Words that emanate from the heart, enter the heart and have their desired effect."

Moses, thus reasoned, if one's words do not come from the heart, if they are insincere and perfunctory, or even if one cannot verbalize these emotions, they will just bounce off their intended recipients, or perhaps even "turn them off."

Thus when Moses saw how he was not getting through, and the children of Israel were not listening, he attributed this to his own spiritual deficiency. Moses was convinced that it was **his** fault—due to his "uncircumcised lips." The term uncircumcised is used Biblically in relation to the

heart, as in "an uncircumcised heart," where the connotation is that one's emotions are blocked. When used in relation to lips, it can be interpreted to mean that the crucial emotions that are necessary for one's words to have any impact were not coming through his lips.

G-d, however, assured Moses that he would succeed. All Moses had to do, G-d told him (Chapter 7, verses 1-2 and Rashi) was to deliver the message one time, verbatim, as he heard it from G-d. Aaron would be the interpreter to express the message in terms that would be understandable to Pharaoh.

Combining Moses and Aaron Approaches

One lesson we learn from this episode that when it comes to teaching and transmitting the beliefs and values of Judaism, one must combine the method of Moses with the method of Aaron. It is imperative that we present the teachings of Judaism, unembellished and unedited, but then follow it up with words of elaboration and commentary.

More specifically this lesson can be applied to the way in which we are to tell the Jewish people and the Pharaoh's of our time that Moshiach is coming to redeem the Jewish people and the entire world from the state of exile. To get the message across, we must use the double-pronged approach that G-d employed prior to the exodus from

Egypt:

One must employ the Moses-Aaron approach. First one ought to transmit the message simply, unadulterated. One must quote the Torah sources that point to the significant times in which we find ourselves; we are living in Messianic times. We must then apply our oratorical and pedagogic skills to make this claim intelligible and acceptable so that it is not just a fundamental belief, accepted on faith, but, moreover, one can easily comprehend and relate to this matter.

(See Essay three for an alternate approach.)

ESSAY NINE

THE FIVE EXPRESSIONS OF REDEMPTION

By not changing their names, the Jewish people in Egypt never lost their identity as Jews.

Corresponding to this virtue, the Torah states that G-d took them out of the burden of Egypt.

The greatest burden is when you lose your identity because it is subsumed within the identity of your tormentor.

The Jews never lost their identity as Jews.

ESSAY NINE

THE FIVE EXPRESSIONS OF REDEMPTION

Four Expressions; Four Cups of Wine

In this week's parsha G-d tells Moses to tell the children of Israel, "I am G-d, I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt, and I will save you from their labor, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you as a people for Myself, and I will be a G-d to you, and you will know that I am G-d, your G-d, who is taking you from under the burdens of Egypt." In this quote the Torah employed four expression of liberation: "I will take you out"; "I will save you"; "I will redeem you"; "I will take you"

The Talmud tells us that these four expressions of liberation are the basis for the requirement to drink four cups of wine at the Passover Seder.

The question one could raise here is: why should the fact that the same Exodus is described with four expressions necessitate drinking four cups? There was only one Exodus, so **shouldn't** there be an obligation to drink only one cup of wine?

Four Stages

The simple explanation is that there were actually four separate stages of their liberation.. And—in the spirit of the Dayeinu hymn—one might suggest that we would have good reason to celebrate even if we would have remained slaves, but spared the intolerable conditions to which **we** were brutally subjected.

Hence, the first cup is our way of expressing gratitude and joy for not being tortured by the Egyptian taskmasters and **for the end of** the back-breaking slave labor.

But G-d did more than just release us from torture and the brutality to which we were subjected before the Exodus. G-d also liberated us from every form—even the most benign form—of slavery.

However, G-d did not stop at freeing us from servitude. He also released us from Egypt. Previously, no Jew could escape from the Egyptian prison. Now, Jews were free to leave Egypt. We have witnessed this form of liberation of Jews from the former Soviet Union, which kept Jews as hostages refusing to let them leave.

G-d was still not content. Not only did He liberate us from the Egyptian prison, He also granted us nationhood and made us His nation, by giving us a constitution—the Torah—that created an eternal bond between G-d and the Jewish people.

Thus, there are actually four different aspects and stages of the Exodus; each of **the four levels of liberation** deserves its own cup of wine to enhance the joy.

The Egyptian Burden

There is still an additional question that we must address to fully appreciate the four expressions of Redemption.

Why is it that in the opening description of how we were freed from the burden, **the Torah** mentions that it was an "Egyptian burden"? Did it make a difference **whether** the Egyptians enslaved and burdened the Jews or some other nation did it? The main point is that we were freed from that form of slavery. It makes little difference who was beating the Israelites.

We can answer this question in light of the explanation that was discussed in last week's thought. It was suggested that the four expressions of Redemption—and the four cups of wine at the Seder—correspond to the four virtues of the Jewish people in Egypt, in which merit they were liberated. And it was also suggested that these four expressions relate to the four areas that must be cultivated **by** us in preparation for the final Redemption.

These four virtues, described by the Midrash, are: a) They did not change their names; b) They did not change their

language; c) They did not slander one another; d) They were not unchaste.

To translate these four virtues into contemporary terms, we must: know who we are; b) speak and think in Jewish terms; c) recognize our inherent Jewish unity; and, d) gain mastery over our desires.

Not changing their names represented the fact that they never lost their identity as Jews. Corresponding to this virtue, the Torah states that G-d took them out of the burden of Egypt, with the emphasis on Egypt. The greatest burden is when you lose your identity and your identity is subsumed within the identity of your tormentor. They did not become Egyptians. This is hinted in an alternate translation of the word "*sivlos*" which means burdens but has also been translated as "tolerance." Thus it reads, "I will take them out of tolerating Egypt." They did not tolerate Egypt. It was not part of their identity.

No Contribution to Egyptian Life

The second virtue of not changing their language was explained in last week's message as a sign that they did not lose their distinctive Jewish way of thinking. A Jew could recognize that he or she is a Jew even while adopting non-Jewish ways of thinking and communicating.

Corresponding to this aspect of liberation, the Torah states, "I will save you from their labor." Here the term labor can mean **the** Egyptian way of doing things. Because **the Jews** exhibited resistance to serving in an Egyptian fashion, G-d saved them from working for **the Egyptians** and contributing to their way of life.

A Major Production

The third virtue of not slandering one another, which expressed their inherent unity, precipitated the third stage of the Exodus; G-d liberated them with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. Had the Jewish people lacked unity, their liberation would have been a private affair. It would have lacked the fanfare that accompanied the Exodus. Now that they were a united people, G-d made the Exodus a spectacular display of miracles to reflect the magnitude of the event that encompassed an entire unified nation.

The fourth virtue was their ability to gain mastery over themselves. They did not succumb to the immoral and depraved ways of the Egyptians. In the merit of this inner strength that **the Jewish people** maintained in Egypt, they were taken by G-d to be His nation. The reward for inner strength is to be given the means to preserve that inner strength. This G-d did by making them His nation and

becoming their G-d at Mount Sinai, **where** G-d said " I am the L-rd Your G-d." The Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement, whose 200th anniversary of his passing we observed last Sunday on the 24th of Teves) provides a novel translation. "I have made My essential name your strength." This means that from Sinai onward, G-d's transcendent being has become the inner strength of each and every Jew. Every Jew possesses the inner fortitude and moral courage to resist all the pressures that threaten our purity and holiness.

The Fifth Cup

In truth, there are actually five expressions of liberation in this week's parsha. After the four that were enumerated above, the Torah continues: "I will bring you to the land, regarding which I raised My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage; I am G-d."

Some say that this fifth expression is the reason for pouring a cup for Elijah, the prophet. It is about the future Redemption that will be ushered in and announced by Elijah. And since we have yet to experience the future Redemption, we do not drink the fifth cup.

In light of the foregoing association of the four expressions and cups of wine with the four virtues that distinguished the Jewish people, to which virtue does the fifth expression correspond?

It may be suggested that the fifth expression, that predicts the future Redemption, relates to the virtue of faith in the promise of Redemption and the desire to be liberated. It does not suffice to maintain our identity, attitude, unity and self-mastery in exile. One must clamor for the Redemption no matter how good things are spiritually and materially in exile.

Indeed, the Talmud states that it was in the merit of Emunah-faith that the Jewish people were liberated from Egypt. More specifically, the Talmud states that it was in the merit of the Jewish women that they were liberated. Actually, these two statements are complementary. The women possessed a greater measure of faith than the men.

So when we pour the fifth cup for Elijah, it is appropriate to reflect on the role of maintaining our faith in, **and our** anticipation **of** the Redemption. It is a time to reinforce our faith that, despite all of the delays, Moshiach's coming is imminent. As we say in the Ani Ma'amin declaration: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach. And even though he tarries, I await his coming **every day**."

Four Cups Plus One

This week's Torah portion features the four expressions of Redemption: "I will take you out...rescue you...redeem you...take you... bring you to the land, and give it to you as a heritage." These four cups we drink Passover night at the Seder were instituted by our sages as a means to express these four expressions/dimensions of liberation.

The question has been raised. Closer scrutiny of the text will show that there are actually five expressions of Redemption. Why then don't we drink a fifth cup for the fifth expression, "veheiveisi" -- "I will bring you"?

One answer given is that the first four expressions of redemption are addressed to the *entire* Jewish community. However, the fifth expression, "I will bring you," refers to the giving of Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish people and does not apply to the tribe of Levi, because they did not have their own portion of Eretz Yisrael. They only had 42 cities plus the 6 cities of refuge which were given to them by the other tribes (Numbers 35). Since "I will bring you" does not apply to everyone, we do not drink a fifth cup. Nevertheless a fifth cup is placed on the table and called "Elijah's cup" because he is the prophet who will announce the coming of Moshiach.

When Moshiach comes, the Talmud tells us, Eretz Yisrael will be divided into 13 portions (Bava Basra 122a), and also

the tribe of Levi will receive its own portion. The tribes of Ephraim and Menashe will share the one portion allotted to the tribe of Yosef, and the 13th portion will be for Moshiach. Hence, it is most appropriate to associate Eliyahu with the fifth cup, for through him all the Jews will be given a heritage in the land.

On a deeper level, the four expressions of Redemption represent the four names/levels of the soul – enumerated in the Midrash and discussed at length in Jewish Mysticism -- which are liberated on Passover night. The fifth expression, which corresponds to the fifth level, the very essence of the soul, can only be fully expressed in the Messianic age. Hence the fifth cup is the one that corresponds to the future.

ESSAY TEN

THE SEVEN PLAGUES

In our attempt to get out of the current exile, we must apply the following lessons that emerge from the first seven plagues:

We have to abandon all the false idols that society has given us (plagues one and two); preplace it with truth (plague three); recognize that we are loved by G-d (plagues four and five) and that He is in control of every aspect of the world and of our lives (plagues six and seven)..

ESSAY TEN

THE SEVEN PLAGUES

Why not One Plague?

This week's Torah portion of Vo'eira introduces us to the first seven of the Ten Plagues. We often think of these terrible calamities G-d visited on Pharaoh and the Egyptian people as examples of Divine retribution. Yet, if G-d wanted to punish them, there was no need for ten plagues. G-d could have eliminated them in one devastating plague. Why the need for dramatics?

In truth, G-d does not punish for the sake of punishment. The purpose of bringing the ten plagues was educational as much as it was G-d's way of expressing His outrage at the treatment the Jewish people received from the Egyptian people. Furthermore, it could be demonstrated that G-d was not simply punishing Pharaoh. The Torah states that G-d said, "and i will harden the heart of Pharaoh" (exodus 7:3). If Pharaoh deserved to be punished, why didn't G-d merely punish him without taking away his free will?

Rather Pharaoh's punishment was meted out by G-d measure for measure. Pharoah rebelled against G-d, saying, "Who is G-d that I should obey his voice?" Anyone who insolently refuses to recognize G-d, and thinks he can do as he pleases, deserves that G-d show him he is not his own boss.

But, the educational lessons of the plagues extend to each and every one of them. Each of the ten plagues introduced the world to another dimension of G-d and His love for the Jewish people. Education cannot come in one sweeping and overwhelming experience. There was a need for ten lessons.

What follows is but one approach to the educational value of each of the first seven plagues.

Blood and Frogs

The first plagues of blood and frogs demonstrated that the Nile was not the G-d the Egyptian people thought it was. As Rashi puts it:

> "Before G-d punishes a nation He first destroys their idols.

If G-d were to crush the spirit of the people, their false beliefs would have allowed them to revert to their old ways.

Before we can punish a person who needs to be rehabilitated the person's false gods must be exposed and eliminated.

Replacement Theology

However, merely destroying someone's false icons does not suffice.

People who have been brainwashed by cults and deprogrammed did not fare better afterwards. You cannot destroy someone's faith in false gods without giving them something genuine to believe in.

While the first two plagues successfully destroyed their image of the Nile as a invincible god, it was the third plague of lice, which the Egyptians could not replicate, that demonstrated that the one G-d of Israel is the only true G-d.

Now that they had a glimpse into truth they were candidates for a more advanced level of their reeducation.

G-d's Love

The fourth and fifth plagues of the mixture of wild beasts and the plague of pestilence - which, the Torah stresses did

not affect the Jewish people, expressed the love G-d has for them.

To simply tell a person how bad he or she is will not change them. Rather one must supply a positive role model to emulate.

This is what the fourth and fifth plagues accomplished that the Egyptians now realized that they should look up to the Jewish people and seethe good in them.

The sixth plague of boils, in addition to the fact that it comprised many miracles; it was the first plague which was directed against their bodies. This plague taught them that G-d is in control not only of the natural world, but also of man.

It also teaches us that before one uses corporal punishment, one should first try to threaten one's property etc. Punishment, even when warranted, should be incremental. If minimal punishment can suffice we have no right to subject them to more intense punishment.

The Message of Unity

The seventh - and last plague discussed in this week's Torah portion - the plague of hail constituted G-d's ability to combine fire and water; that G-d was able to bring together two conflicting forces of nature and make peace

between them. Until this plague, the Egyptians could have thought that each plague was generated by another deity in control of each of the natural forces. When they saw how fire and water, the two most diametrically opposed natural forces were brought together, they realized that there is one G-d who transcends - and can therefore unite - all the forces of nature.

In our attempt to get out of the current exile, we must apply the foregoing lessons:

We have to abandon all the false idols that society has given us (plagues one and two); preplace it with truth (plague three); recognize that we are loved by G-d (plagues four and five) and that He is in control of every aspect of the world and of our lives (plagues six and seven)..

ESSAY ELEVEN

FOUR REDEMPTIONS PLUS ONE

One can be freed from torture, but can still be plagued by inner turmoil and anguish.

One can be freed as a slave, but still have others who act like one's masters.

One can be free from a given country, but still have no country to call their own.

One can have Torah which provides us with inner freedom, but we might learn Torah in an exile tainted manner.

We need the fifth level of liberation, associated with the coming of Moshiach, when we will have no master other than G-d and our Torah study will rid us of the last vestige of inner exile.

ESSAY ELEVEN

FOUR REDEMPTIONS PLUS ONE

The Four (Five?) Expressions of Liberation

> "I will take you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments and I will take you to me as a nation."

These are the four expressions of Redemption that G-d told Moses to convey to the Jewish people in Egypt.

Why did G-d have to give them the good news of Redemption in four stages? Wouldn't it have been sufficient to say: "I will liberate you from Egypt?"

In truth, the experience of the exodus from Egypt was a fourfold one. It was crucial that they realized that there was a need to be aware of and show appreciation for all the four stages of redemption.

Stage One

(a) **I will take you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.**

This refers to their release from the tortuous bondage.

Jews were not just slaves; they were tortured in the most cruel and barbaric fashion.

According to the Midrash, Pharaoh ordered Jewish babies be crushed into the mortar if they had not produced their quota of bricks. This and many other cruel and unhuman suffering places the evil of Egypt on a much "higher" (or "lower") position than "just" slavery.

To be relieved of the persecution, even to remain slaves, would have been cause for celebration.

Stage Two

(b) **I will deliver you from their bondage.**

This refers to their release from servitude. Even though their emancipation would have left them subjects of Pharaoh in a totalitarian regime, they would have been eternally grateful to G-d for having removed the shackle of slavery from them.

When a human being lacks freddom to live hisor her life it affcts the entireperson. It affects his or her mind and heart.

A human being was born to express their own identity, not someone else's.

In our society we still practice slavery. Prison, a punishment the Torah never accepted, is slavery! We deny a person his or her humanity.

The only silver lining there was for the Jews to be slaves is that they would ultimately be challenged to submit themselves to G-d to serve as His subjects. That form of slavery and servitude is the most liberating one because it aligns our own being with that of our Creators.

Stage Three

(c) **I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments.**

This refers to their liberation from Egypt. Now they were a free people, with the opportunity to express their G-d given potential and follow in the footsteps of their ancestors, unimpeded.

Egypt was also the most depraved society of that time. Living in Egypt, even as free people, had a deleterious effect on the morals of the Jewish people.

Stage Four

(d) **I will take you to me as a nation.**

This refers to their spiritual liberation that occurred when G-d took them as a nation at Mount Sinai.

To be liberated without being taken by G-d at Mount Sinai would have been incomplete, because, they still would have retained a slave and exile mentality. The experience of Sinai, their receiving of the Torah, gave the Jewish people the ability to rise above the exile mindset. They were now given a positive identity not just the absence of a negative experience and identity.

Drinking Four Cups of Wine

Because of these four expressions of Redemption that appear in this week's parsha, the rabbis instituted the drinking of four cups of wine during the Seder of Passover.

Alternatively, these four expressions are said to correspond to the four redemptions from the Egyptian and subsequent exiles the Jews would endure.

The Fifth Expression of Liberation

Upon closer scrutiny one finds a fifth expression "and I will bring you to the good land…" This expression is said to

correspond to the future Redemption and Messianic Age.

Some commentators state that the fifth cup of Elijah we have at the Seder corresponds to this fifth expression of Redemption. That redemption, we are told, will be ushered in by the prophet Elijah.

The fact that G-d mentioned this fifth expression in the context of the Redemption from Egypt suggests that the future Redemption, in reality, began thousands of years back when the first exodus from Egypt commenced. In the words of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson,

> "Ever since the Exodus from Egypt we are on our way to the future Redemption."

What this means is that from the moment the Jews were liberated from Egypt, the entire process and dynamic of liberation was already unleashed. It is not something that we have to create now; it is the culmination of a process. For over three thousand years we worked on making that which has already been generated, complete.

One way of understanding the completeness of the process of redemption as it pertains to the four aforementioned levels, is as follows.

One can be freed from torture, but can still be plagued by inner turmoil and anguish that is just as bad as torture from the outside.

One can be freed as a slave, but still have others who act like one's masters.

One can be free from a given country, but still feel pain at having left their host country and have no country to call their own.

And finally, one can have the Torah which provides us with inner freedom, but because of exile conditions we might learn Torah in an exile tainted manner.

To correct all of the above, we need the fifth expression and its imminent realization. Then we will be rid of all external and internal turmoil. We will have no master other than G-d and our Torah study which we will hear from the mouth of Moshiach in our own Land of Israel will be pure so that we will be rid of the last vestige of inner exile.

ESSAY TWELVE

FOUR TO THE FOURTH POWER

The number four, in conjunction with the Seder (which is full of fours, such as the Four Questions, the Four Sons, etc.), has been associated with the four letters of the Divine name, known as the Tetragrammaton.

This name of G-d contains the force responsible for creation in general and the human condition in particular.

Each one of us possesses these four letters of G-d's name in our soul and psyche.

However, just as these four Divine letters are responsible for our personalities, they can also be seen as the forces to remove the exile-related blockages preventing us from experiencing the full force of our G-dly soul.

ESSAY TWELVE

FOUR TO THE FOURTH POWER

The Paradigm of Redemption

The Exodus from Egypt is the paradigm for the future Redemption. The Exodus introduced and instilled within our psyches the power of liberation for the future. Indeed, we mention the Exodus daily in our prayers for many reasons, including:

First, to remind us that we too have to get out of exile, and that we can derive the power to accomplish that from the Exodus from Egypt.

Second, even as we live in exile—in these last moments before the Final Redemption—we have the ability to rise above the constraints imposed by exile conditions and to be liberated each day anew.

Obviously, the details of the Exodus from Egypt are relevant for our times.

Four Expressions of Redemption; Four Cups of Wine

In the very beginning of this week's parsha G-d introduces His plan for the Exodus by couching the theme of liberation in four different ways:

...I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt.

I shall rescue you from their service

I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you...

It was based on these four expressions of liberation that our Sages instituted drinking four cups of wine at the Seder Pesach night.

Let us consider how do these four expressions apply to our lives in exile and, particularly, how do they relate to the future Redemption.

4x4x4x4

If we examine Maimonides' (whose Yahrtzeit we observed only last week on the 20th of Teves) description of the Messianic Age, we can discern four stages; in fact, there are

several sets of fours that pertain to the Moshiach and the Messianic Age, but first a prefatory note is in order.

Contrary to a false belief that has circulated in recent times, we Jews believe not only in a Messianic Age, but also that it will be ushered in by a Jewish leader, referred to as the Moshiach. Indeed, there is no such thing as Redemption without a redeemer. In Maimonides' words (*Hilchos Melachim* Chapter 11): "Whoever does not believe in him… denies not only the other prophets, but [also] the Torah and Moses, our teacher."

How do we know who is qualified to be Moshiach? Maimonides, based on Biblical and Talmudic sources, ruled that Moshiach's "credentials" require that he meets **four** conditions:

First, he is a leader descended from King David.

Second, he is steeped in Torah and preoccupied with observing its commandments.

Third, he is engaged in influencing all Jewish people to follow in the Torah's ways and mends the breaches in its observance.

Fourth, he fights the wars of G-d.

One who meets these four conditions, Maimonides rules, has established himself as the presumptive Moshiach, even before the actual Redemption commences.

It is interesting to note that Maimonides cites **four** Biblical proofs for Moshiach and the Messianic Age:

First, from Deuteronomy (30:3-5) where the promise of Redemption is made in **four** segments: 1) G-d will bring back your captives and have mercy upon you; 2) He will gather you…; 3) If your dispersed will be at the ends of the heavens…; 4) –d will bring you…

Second, from statements made by all of the prophets.

Third, from the prophecies of Bilam. And interestingly there too, the Rambam divides the proof from Bilam into four segments.

Fourth, from the additional cities of refuge the Torah states will be established in the future.

Four Changes for the Jewish People

Now that we know the criteria for the Moshiach, we can discern **four** changes that will occur under his direction, specifically with respect to the Jewish people.

First, he renews the Davidic dynasty, returning it to its initial sovereignty.

Second, Moshiach will build the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple in its proper place.

Third, he will gather all of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

Fourth, he will reinstate all of the ritual worship practices that could not be performed because of exile conditions.

Four for the Entire World

After Moshiach restores the status of the Jewish people and their observances to their rightful place, the Messianic Age then assumes a more universal direction. Here too one may discern four stages:

First, Moshiach will eradicate the evil forces that persecuted the Jewish people and stood in the way of their ability to build the Bais Hamikdash, etc.

Second, Moshiach will then eliminate the false ideologies and religions that contradict the Torah and lead the entire world's population to recognize that there is only one G-d and serve Him in unison.

Third, the entire world's population will live in peace and harmony with the Jewish people.

Fourth, there will be no hunger, war or conflicts for there will be an abundance of good and the entire world will be inundated and deluged with the knowledge of G-d.

The Final Stages

If we examine Maimonides' description of the final stage of the Messianic Age we discover that he refers to **four** changes:

> "In that era, there will be neither 1) famine, 2) nor war, 3) envy, nor 4) rivalry."

After describing what we will no longer have to contend with in the Messianic Age, Maimonides then proceeds to enumerate four positive phenomena:

> 1) For good will flow in abundance; 2) All the delights will be as common as dust; 3) The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d; 4) The Jews will be great Sages and know hidden matters, attaining knowledge of their Creator to the extent of human potential.

Notice that in the last item describing the spiritual state of the Jewish people, Maimonides subdivides it into four:

> 1) Great Sages; 2) Know hidden matters; 3) Attaining knowledge of their Creator; 4) To the extent of human potential.

Four for *Our* Freedom

Now that we have documented the ubiquitous nature of the **four** aspects of the future Redemption that stem from the four expressions of Redemption in relation to the Exodus, we have to understand how the number four relates to our personal liberation from our own internal exile.

The number four, in conjunction with the Seder (which is full of fours, such as the Four Questions, the Four Sons, etc.), has been associated with the four letters of the Divine name, known as the Tetragrammaton. This name of G-d contains the force responsible for creation in general and the human condition in particular. Each one of us possesses these four letters of G-d's name in our soul and psyche.

However, just as these four Divine letters are responsible for our personalities, they can also be seen as the forces to remove the exile-related blockages preventing us from experiencing the full force of our G-dly soul.

The first step to freeing ourselves begins with the letter *yud.* This letter is the smallest in the Hebrew Alphabet. It is represented sometimes by a geometric point that has no real dimensions. This is the symbol of humility. When we are full of ourselves we are not receptive to G-d. We can we see Creation but only from within Creation's perspective, not from the point of view of the Creator. The

yud expresses of the essence of our soul, that part which is always connected to G-d but remains covered up by exile. We must put our own egos to the side and allow our simple faith in G-d and in His promise to redeem us and bring our souls to the surface.

The second step is bound up in the letter *hei*. This is an expansive letter and it represents expansive knowledge. Simple faith alone will not suffice. To be sure, we must develop a foundation of unadulterated faith in G-d and His ability to take us out of both the universal and personal exile. But we must then apply our intellect to gain the understanding of the dynamics of liberation. In practical terms, we must study Torah, particularly the texts of Torah that deal with Redemption, to saturate our minds with Divine wisdom. This will enable us to get our minds out of their own form of exile.

The third step is centered on the letter *vav,* which is said to represent our emotions. Our emotions are skewed by exile. We lack desire and passion for G-d and Moshiach since we direct our love and fear only toward the material and physical aspects of life.

Once we have liberated our faith (*Yud)* and achieved our understanding (*Hei)* we can then free our emotions (*Vav*). Instead of harboring misdirected passion for material things, our passion becomes refined enough to love the

Higher aspects of life. At that juncture we will desire and yearn only for Moshiach and the world of Redemption. However, we can not only rely on our faith and intellect to generate the liberating emotions; we must, as the Torah states, "**direct** the knowledge to our hearts."

The fourth and final stage in our efforts at liberation is the final letter of the Tetragrammaton, the *Hei.* This letter is said to correspond to the process of communication of our thoughts through speech and action.

It is not enough to have the proper faith, understanding and passion. The proof that we have internalized something to the extent that it has truly affected us comes when we translate those newly attained thoughts into speech and action.

How may we apply this to our circumstances today? We should speak of Redemption and translate our belief, understanding and feelings of Redemption into tangible examples by breaking free from our internal exile. We can do that by acting in a redemptive fashion.

When we break out of the elements that limit us and do things that may be against our nature to help others, we then have successfully internalized all four letters of G-d's name and brought ourselves into a personal balance that parallels the four expressions and levels of Redemption.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE THREE GUARANTEES

How could a loving G-d allow Galus to continue?

This question is really a statement.

This "question" does not demand a philosophical answer.

It wants nothing less than G-d taking us, His children, into His warm embrace. We feel it in our gut that our loving Father will not tolerate any more suffering on our part.

This approach is intended not as a philosophical challenge but an appeal from the depths of our heart to the depths of G-d's "heart," as it were.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE THREE GUARANTEES

Moses Concerns Unfounded?

After Moses complains to G-d at the end of last week's parsha why He had made things worse for the Children of Israel, G-d responds in the beginning of this week's parsha Vo'eira with words of rebuke for Moses followed by His guarantee that He will redeem them imminently.

> "I revealed Myself to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob... I established My covenant with them to give then the Land of Cana'an... I also heard the moans of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians are holing as slaves... Therefore, say to the children of Israel, 'I am G-d, and I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt...'"

Since these words were said by G-d in response to Moses' complaint that the process of liberation did not commence, we are to assume that in the foregoing verses G-d was supplying the reasons that Moses concerns were unfounded.

And as some commentators point out, if we carefully survey G-d's response to Moses we will see that He lists three reasons why He will finally redeem them:

The First Point: Appearance to the Patriarchs

The first point G-d makes is that He appeared to the Patriarchs. The implication is that He had promised them that He would enslave their children and then liberate them. However, the reference to G-d's promise only appears in the next verse prefaced with the word "also." This implies that the first compelling reason for Moses to believe that the time of the Exodus has truly arrived is the simple fact that G-d appeared to the Patriarchs.

What is it about G-d's appearance to the Patriarchs that dictated that the Jews would be redeemed?

One answer to this question is that the Patriarchs were so devoted and faithful to G-d that G-d owed them the freedom of their children even if He had not promised it outright. If Moses had any doubts about the reality of the Exodus he could rest assured that G-d would not allow the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to remain enslaved in Egypt.

And it was also obvious that He would redeem them soon because, as our Sages tell us, if the people would have

remained any longer in Egypt they might have never been capable of being redeemed. They would have degenerated so that there might have not been anyone or anything left to redeem. If not now, then never. The thought that G-d would allow the children of the Patriarchs to be lost was untenable.

The Second and Third Points: The Covenant and Intolerable Suffering

The second reason Moses could remain secure in the knowledge that the people would be liberated is the covenant He made with them. G-d promised. And G-d would certainly not go back on His word.

The third factor or reason Moses, in effect, was given by G-d as to the inevitability of the freedom of the Children of Israel, and that it was imminent, was the fact that their suffering had become intolerable. Even if G-d had decreed that they would be slaves in a foreign land, the Egyptians went way overboard in afflicting them. There was no way G-d could allow this outrage to continue.

The Three Contemporary Factors

In our own day and age we know we are so close to the Redemption because of the same three factors. And if we

analyzed these three factors we will see that they reflect three distinct parts of our personalities: cold logic, faith and passionate emotion.

Logic dictates that we should be taken out of exile:

Our ancestors and forebears have done so much to sacrifice for Judaism and the Jewish people. How could G-d allow their work to have been an exercise in futility and all their sacrifices in vain? Sheer logic compels us to believe that the end is near; a time when all of our forebears' and ancestors' efforts will bear fruit. Especially now, when the forces of assimilation have so reduced our numbers and continues to undermine of future, is the argument so compelling. As one great sage of the past put it: "Moshiach must come soon, or else he will have no one to come to."

Faith dictates that our Redemption is near:

In addition, G-d promised through His prophets that He will bring the Redemption. Numerous Biblical and Talmudic prophecies that have materialized in our day coupled with clear pronouncements from contemporary Jewish leaders, particularly the Lubavitcher Rebbe, that "the time for our Redemption has arrived," all point to the fact that we are living in Messianic times.

Our feelings also dictate that our loving Father in Heaven will not allow us to suffer anymore. We have suffered so much in exile.

A Statement; Not a Question

How could a loving G-d allow this situation to continue? And while these words seemed to be phrased as a question, they are actually the cry of the soul of a caring human being.

This "question" does not demand a philosophical answer. It wants nothing less than G-d taking us, His children, into His warm embrace. We feel it in our gut that our loving Father will not tolerate any more suffering on our part.

This approach, as an intellectual argument, can be refuted, but it is intended not as a philosophical challenge as much as an appeal from the depths of our heart to the depths of G-d's "heart," as it were.

One of the differences between an intellectual challenge to G-d and the venting of our emotions is that the former focuses on the past: "Why did this tragedy occur?" It is based on genuine intellectual curiosity. A human being is an intellectual and inquisitive creature. At the very least, humans possess an intellectual component that prompts them to ask questions.

By contrast, the person whose question is an expression of his or her pain cries out to G-d for the future. "Please remove my pain. I cannot take it any longer. How much longer shall we have to suffer? I want a guarantee that it will not happen again," etc. etc.

Another salient difference between the two forms of the question:

When the question is of a philosophical nature one could be satisfied with an answer; the person who expresses his or her emotions cannot accept anything short of a total reversal of the painful condition.

In summary, all three faculties of our soul: our logic, faith and emotions combine to forcefully argue and militate for an immediate end to the painful exile and the ushering in of the promised Redemption.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

HOT AND COLD

There is a time when indifference can be a virtue:

When we remain cool and collected in the presence of people whose passions are misplaced.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

HOT AND COLD

Daily Remembrance

Of all the Biblical experiences, the one that Judaism requires us to remember on a daily basis is the Exodus from Egypt.

Mitzraim, the Hebrew name for Egypt, our Sages tell us, is not only the name of a country; it is also a description of a state of mind that inhibits our potential for spiritual growth. *Mitzraim* cognate to the word *Meitzarim* (straits) is a reference to the constraints imposed on our soul by our bodies, physical needs, and environment. When we feel that we are in a rut, when we stagnate, it is a symptom of the *Mitzraim* syndrome we all suffer from in exile. And it is this dimension of *Mitzraim* that we are enjoined by the Torah to get out of every day.

For guidance as to how precisely we can accomplish this modern day liberation, we can turn to the Ten Plagues -the instruments G-d used to free the Israelites from ancient

Egyptian bondage – and apply them to our own personal *Mitzraim*.

The first two plagues both involved the Nile River. The first one converted its waters to blood, while in the second one, the frogs emerged from the Nile River and spread through all of Egypt – even into the fiery ovens of the Egyptians.

The Ten Plagues were more than just ways of punishing the Egyptians. They were primarily tools to educate the Egyptians as well as the Jews as to G-d's greatness. Rashi, for example, informs us that before G-d destroys a nation, He first destroys their idols. By striking the Nile, G-d destroyed their greatest idol and source of their evil ways.

Similarly, the plagues have much to offer us in the form of guidance and enlightenment on our path towards Redemption:

Indifference and Passion

The Rebbe explains that water, being cold in its natural state, represents the coldness we often exhibit towards matters of the spirit.

Blood, on the other hand, stands for life, enthusiasm and the passion we possess. The plague of blood thus

symbolizes the conversion of icy indifference (regarding matters of holiness) into warmth and excitement.

A Jew is a member of a living people, the Torah says, because we cleave to the living G-d. A Jew's existence is characterized by his/her passion for true life, which is anything connected to and associated with G-d. When we find ourselves in exile, in modern day *Mitzriam's*, we discover that we no longer have this passion for Torah and Mitzvos. Our first step in the process of Redemption is thus to search for the fire and flame within our souls that has to be fanned into a roaring fire, until we can consciously feel the passion for G-d and G-dly pursuits.

Cooling our Enthusiasm for Materiality

Step number one is followed by step number two. It is not enough to instill life into our spiritual existence, but we must also look for ways to cool down the enthusiasm and obsession we have for materialism.

To be sure, the Torah does not want us to negate the physical world. G-d's objective in creating the physical world was for us to elevate it and refine it. But, the only way we can accomplish the goal of bringing holiness into the physical is to cool down our ardor for the material aspects of existence. By accentuating the spiritual

dimension of everything, while engaged in physical activities, we have the capacity to bring sanctity into them.

When Indifference is a Virtue

This second step towards Redemption is symbolized by the second plague of frogs. The cold blooded frogs that originated in the cold waters of the Nile River represent the detachment and coldness we must bring into our material concerns. There is a time when indifference can be a virtue; when we remain cool and collected in the presence of people whose passions are misplaced. The frogs even jumped into the ovens – to teach us to cool down the passion of Egyptian life – our obsession with materialism.

As we approach the final Redemption, we must realize that the way to redemption must follow the example of the Exodus from Egypt, as the prophet says: "As in the days that you left Egypt, I will show you wonders."

The first two steps are to instill passion in spiritual matters and to reduce our love for materialism. This will lead us to the ultimate world of Redemption that will be characterized by the thirst and passion for G-d we will all possess. At that time, despite the proliferation of all material goods, they will not dampen our love for G-d and His Torah.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE FROG

If we would trace everything in this world to its source, we would realize that there is but one, absolutely one, source to everything.

Any appearance of plurality in our source of life is but an illusion created by our doing.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE FROG

The Second Plague

The second of the ten plagues G-d brought onto the Egyptians was the plague of "frogs." Upon striking of the Nile, the frogs emerged from the Nile and "covered the Land of Egypt."

Rashi, the principle Bible commentator, notes that the Torah employs the singular word for frog-tzefardeah, rather then the plural "tzefardim." Rashi's simple explanation for this anomaly is that the word really does not mean frog, but the swarming of the frog species.

Rashi's preferred explanation, however, is the one he cites from the Midrash. In fact, the Midrash states, there was only one frog that emerged from the Nile. When the Egyptians saw this one frog emerge they began to strike it, whereupon "streams" of frogs came out of the frog that swarmed throughout the Land of Egypt.

The Midrash is not a book of fanciful legends. It contains traditions that were handed down through the generations. But, the Midrash is even more than just oral traditions that provide us with greater detail with regard to Biblical narratives and laws. The Midrash was intended, among other objectives, to teach us spiritual and moral lessons, by focusing on certain anomalies in the Biblical text.

With this introduction in mind, the question begs to be asked: What moral and spiritual lesson can we derive from the fact that there was actually only one frog, from which multitudinous frogs were generated, when the Egyptians struck that lone frog?

Our Soul's Quest for Freedom

The Ten Plagues were not just ways of punishing the Egyptians or motivating them to set the Jews free. The plagues were also, if not primarily, intended to teach the Egyptians and us certain theological and moral lessons. For the entire story of the Exodus is more than just an historical saga; it is the story of our own soul's quest for freedom.

The plague of the frogs was intended to discredit their belief in false gods. The Nile River was worshipped by Egypt and by having the river turn into blood (the first plague) and then become the source of disgusting frogs

pervading every one's life, the Nile was thoroughly discredited as a true deity.

But, the question remains, why was there a need for two plagues to strike the Nile? What did the second plague contribute to their understanding of theology?

Notion of Unity Earth Shattering!

Contrary to the view of some anthropologists and historians, the Egyptians were not monotheists. Our Sages, based on explicit Biblical texts, tell us that they worshipped the Nile, lambs, Ba'al Tzephon and Pharaoh himself, among other deities. The mindset of the pagan culture of ancient Egypt was that there were multiple forces that were responsible for the events and conditions of life.

The notion of unity promoted by Judaism was the most radical departure from the pagan mindset. This explains why Pharaoh says to Moses:

> "Who is G-d that I should listen to His voice and let Israel out? I do not know of G-d, nor will I let Israel out!"

Why would a man who was well aware of the existence of so many gods find it so difficult to believe that there might be another god somewhere? In truth, if Moses would have used the plural name for G-d "Elo-him," that connotes that

G-d is the source of and manifests Himself within natural forces, he would have not been so averse to recognizing His existence. But he did take exception to the name of G-d employed by Moses that denotes absolute unity and transcendence over all existence.

G-d Creates Unity; We Create Multiplicity

By having the lone frog emerge from the water, G-d's intention was to dramatize the idea that multiple creatures can all come from one solitary source. And that it is man's actions—symbolized by the striking of the frog—that produces multiplicity. If we would trace everything in this world to its source, we would realize that there is but one, absolutely one, source to everything. Any appearance of plurality in our source of life is but an illusion created by our doing.

What this says to modern people is that while we may not worship the Nile or any of the natural forces the way the ancients did, we also find ways of seeing multiple sources for our existence.

An illustration of this is when G-d is deemed to be a benevolent force that does not have control over all of existence; we are essentially stating that there are other parallel sources to existence. We are paraphrasing Pharaoh

who said "I do not know [the exclusive] G-d; [the one source of everything]."

The plague of frogs provides us with a simple repudiation of that mindset, by demonstrating how the notion of multifarious forces is one that **we** create. But even that mindset comes from G-d. G-d, the true source of everything, gives us the ability to see division where there is unity. This He does so that we have the challenge to search for and discover unity, within the diversity.

Search for the Not so Common, Common Source!

Our mission is to search for the not so common, Common source.

And as we get closer to the Messianic Age when G-d's exclusivity will become fully accepted by the entire world, we see how the notion of unity is dominating all areas of life. Only in the area of human relationships are we seriously lagging behind. In virtually every sphere—communications, transfer of information and science—unity is the name of the game. Our work is cut out for us to recognize the absolute Divine unity that pervades all of existence; the realization of which will unify all of humankind as well.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

DIVINE MICROMANAGEMENT

The entire future of the world, the ultimate age of Redemption, is not necessarily dependent on some earth shattering gesture on our part.

One minor act of kindness and goodness, one more Mezuzah on our door posts, one more dollar to tzedakah, can be the one act that will transform the entire world.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

DIVINE MICROMANAGEMENT

The Third Plague

This week's Torah portion highlights seven of the ten plagues that G-d used to crush Pharaoh and the Egyptian people. It is obvious that had G-d wanted it so, Pharaoh could have been "convinced" that it was in his own best interest to let the Jews go after the first plague. Why was there a need for all ten?

Commentators point out that each plague served an educational objective as well as a form of punishment and a means of coercion.

In this week's message we will focus on the third plague, referred to in Hebrew as *Kinnim* or lice. What was unique about this plague in terms of the effect it had on the Egyptians?

G-d's "Finger"

Upon closer scrutiny it is clear that this plague was the

first to impress the Egyptian sorcerers that this was not magic, but it was, in their words: "the finger of G-d."

Considering that these pagans did not even know of G-d's existence previously as Pharaoh exclaimed earlier: "I don't know G-d that I should hearken to his voice!" their admission now that this was an expression of His power, represented a major change in their attitude.

The Talmud -- cited by Rashi — explains why they were impressed with the plague of lice more than the two earlier ones of blood and frogs. Whereas their powers of magic extended to larger forms, they were impotent insofar as creatures that were smaller than a "barley grain." When these sorcerers saw that G-d did not have that limitation and he was able to produce even lice that were smaller than a barley grain, they were convinced that G-d's power exceeded theirs.

Upon deeper reflection it would seem that their admission that G-d's power that wrought this plague was greater than the power of magic, in more than just a quantitative sense. To suggest that G-d's preeminence over the sorcerers of Egypt was limited to the size of the object they wished to create is hardly an educational "coup" and victory for the forces of holiness.

Could G-d Relate to Small Things?

In truth, their perception that their powers did not extend to miniscule things, derived from their limited notion of what a deity is. For them, a great power could not relate to anything less than a power that is virtually as great. A mighty monarch would never lower himself to deal with the lowliest subjects of his kingdom. To reach them, he must delegate responsibility to lower level officials.

This was, in essence, the very origins of paganism. According to Maimonides the original pagans believed in G-d, but they also believed that it was beneath His dignity to deal with the lowly affairs of our physical world. G-d, they reasoned, must have delegated power and responsibility to lower deities such as the sun, moon and other celestial bodies.

When the sorcerers saw that G-d could indeed relate to the most miniscule and insignificant creatures, it introduced them to the truth about G-d's ability to relate to the greatest and the lowliest equally.

Only a finite king can be more partial to a higher level of power and indifferent to lower levels. G-d who is truly infinite can relate to even the most insignificant being. In short, G-d is no closer to a more important creature and no more distant from the most inconsequential one.

Judaism Sanctifies the Small just like the Big

This lesson forms the basis of Judaism as well. Most of the Torah is filled with G-dly commands that dictate to us how we should think, talk and act.. Many ask the question, why would such an omnipotent G-d be concerned with such "trivial" matters as the food we eat, the words we speak etc.? Wouldn't G-d get more out of the more spiritually glamorous experiences than with the minute details of our everyday lives?

The answer is that because G-d is absolutely infinite, He can relate to anything without it affecting His greatness. The more trivial the action that we do for G-d, the more it expresses the "finger of G-d."

One Action can Save the World!

With this in mind, we can better appreciate Maimonides' statement that even one positive action can save the entire world. The entire future of the world, the ultimate age of Redemption, is not necessarily dependent on some earth shattering gesture on our part. One minor act of kindness and goodness, one more Mezuzah on our door posts, one more dollar to tzedakah, can be the one act that will transform the entire world. And just as the recognition of the Egyptian elite that the Jewish G-d can be expressed through the most miniscule action was a major step in

preparing the Jewish nation for Redemption, so too, in our day and age, the recognition that **every** Mitzvah counts, will usher in the future Redemption through the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

A LINE ON THE WALL

In the days of old, there were those people whose lives were devoted to one area of Jewish expression.

Today, as we prepare for the dynamic period of the future Messianic Age, we must all become eclectic.

While we must resist dilettantism, we must learn to combine the best of all the worlds of goodness, because we are closer to the time when the name of G-d—Havaye—will become completely revealed, in the light of which, we can all combine opposites.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

A LINE ON THE WALL

The Seventh Plague

At the end of this week's parsha, we read of the seventh plague administered to Egypt; the plague of hail.

There is something peculiar about the way this seventh plague was introduced to Pharaoh. This is how the Torah describes the way G-d asked Moses to warn Pharaoh:

> "If you still tread upon My people, not sending them out, then I am going to rain down a very heavy hail at this time tomorrow, the likes of which has never occurred in Egypt from the day it was founded until now."

What did G-d mean when He said: "At this time?"

Rashi explains that Moses scratched a line on the wall for Pharaoh, and said, "Tomorrow, when the sun reaches this point, the hail will come down."

The question has been asked, why was it necessary for Moses to scratch a line on the wall? Would it make that much of a difference if Moses had simply told Pharaoh that tomorrow the hail will fall? Why did he have to be so precise?

Combining Opposites

The answer to this question lies in the uniqueness of the seventh plague, the last one mentioned in this week's parsha (the remaining three are discussed in next week's parsha).

This plague expressed the ultimate power of G-d to combine opposites. This expressed itself in several ways:

First, the hail consisted of both ice and fire!

Second, this plague of hail was the harshest of all the six preceding plagues and was a dramatic expression of G-d's attribute of justice. Yet, simultaneously, this is the only plague in which G-d provided a way for people to escape. Immediately after G-d asks Moses to tell the Egyptians that this hail will be unprecedented, He continues:

> "Now send, gather in your livestock and all that you have in the field."

This plague of hail was simultaneously an expression of G-d's harshest judgment and G-d's attribute of mercy.

Past, Present and Future Wrapped in One

This explains why there was a need to indicate the precise time of the plague. The name of G-d that is used throughout the Ten Plagues is the most essential name, known as the Tetragrammaton (The Four Lettered Name), or Havaye in Hebrew (the letters of the name rearranged so as not to unlawfully pronounce the name).

This is the name Moses used in introducing the G-d of Israel to Pharaoh, and this is the name about which Pharaoh declared "I do not know G-d;" referring to the name Havaye.

This four lettered name is an anagram for the Hebrew words that represent all the three tenses: haya (was), hoveh (is) and yihye (will be).

In other words, this name of G-d represents the aspect of G-d that transcends the parameters of time and was the dynamic force behind this plague as well as all the others. And yet, this plague occurred at a precise time. It combined G-d's timelessness and time.

Kabbalistic and Chassidic teaching maintains that the plagues were not just punishment for the Egyptians. They were also spiritual energies that conditioned the Israelites to get out of their own spiritual bondage as a prelude to their physical liberation.

Slavery and Loss of Humanity

One of the conditions associated with slavery is the drudgery and single dimension of life.

One of the things that distinguish a human being from an animal is that a human being is, by nature, a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted creature. An animal is incapable of changing and altering its focus and direction. It is, in a sense, a slave to its one directional instinct of survival. A human being, by contrast, can break out of its mold and transform itself from a judgmental authority figure into a benevolent individual.

Thus a person who is incapable of changing his or her routine—emotionally, mentally, spiritually or physically—loses a chunk of their humanity and reduced to the level of an animal in one important respect.

Part of the liberation process required that the Israelites be exposed to the Divine energy that combines two opposites and when revealed transforms the enslaved individual into a truly free soul.

Hailing the "Plague" of Hail Today

Living today on the threshold of the Redemption through Moshiach, we must reintroduce the positive spiritual

dynamics of the Ten Plagues as a way of preparing ourselves for the imminent Redemption.

Translated the plague of hail into practical terms, we must learn to become multi-dimensional in our human and spiritual endeavors. We must combine intense intellectual study of Torah with practical deeds suffused with heartfelt emotion.

Whereas in the days of old, there were those people whose lives were devoted to one area of Jewish expression, today, as we prepare for the dynamic period of the future Messianic Age, we must all become eclectic. While we must resist dilettantism, we must learn to combine the best of all the worlds of goodness, because we are closer to the time when the name of G-d—Havaye—will become completely revealed, in the light of which, we can all combine opposites.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TEN, FORTY OR FIFTY PLAGUES

R. Eliezer's "four level" approach to getting rid of evil means that we must work on all conscious levels of our soul, making sure they are not paralyzed.

This means that we must get our actions, attitudes, intellect and will-power, to not be contaminated with negative influences and to not stagnate.

Doing that will suffice to destroy the stifling forces of Egypt and will usher in the final Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TEN, FORTY OR FIFTY PLAGUES

Three Objectives of the Ten Plagues

Contrary to the popular notion, the Ten Plagues, discussed in this week's *parsha*, were not only punishments for the Egyptians for their merciless treatment of the Hebrews. The Ten Plagues actually served at least two additional functions.

First, it was an educational device intended to teach the Egyptians as well as the Jewish people that there is a G-d; that G-d could exercise control over nature and that G-d had a special relationship with the Jewish people.

Second, while the Ten Plagues were wreaking havoc on the Egyptian people and institutions, there was a simultaneous spiritual process that was directed against the evil energies that dominated the Egyptian empire.

With this introduction, we can better understand the discussion in the Midrash concerning the Ten Plagues.

The following exposition is based on the early work, the *Kolbo* and elucidated by the Rebbe.

Each Plague Composite of Four or Five Plagues

R. Eliezer stated that each of the Ten Plagues actually comprised **four** specific plagues. R. Akiva disagrees and maintains that each of the Ten Plagues consisted of **five** particular plagues.

One can only wonder, what is the significance as to whether the plagues consisted of four parts or of five? And what precisely are these sages arguing about? And, more importantly, what moral lesson can we derive from this knowledge?

In light of the foregoing insight — that the plagues were designed to counter the forces of evil that existed in Egypt — we can appreciate why each plague had to be seen as possessing four or five components. For, as we shall see, evil can be described as having its deleterious effects on the world either in terms of the number four or the number five. We will understand this point, by way of the following introduction.

The Four Elements and the Quintessential Level

According to the Midrash, all of physical matter consists, figuratively speaking, of the four elements of: fire, wind, water and earth. This should not be taken literally, as some

have suggested that there is actual fire in every object. Rather, everything in the physical realm possesses a metaphoric form of fire, wind, water and earth.

In addition to the four elements that make up the character of every object, there is also a fifth level, the quintessence, which is identified with the very essence of the object. One can destroy an object by crumbling it, for example, but the object still exists, albeit in a modified form. If we would burn the object instead, we would have destroyed its very essence as well.

How Far did their Evil Penetrate?

So when we learn that the Ten Plagues were directed against the evil forces within Egypt, the question arises: How far did the evil permeate Egypt, its people and institutions?

Did the evil just reach the periphery of Egyptian life? If that were the case, the plagues would not have to have penetrated and destroyed all the four specific elements of Egypt.

Indeed, both R. Eliezer and R. Akiva agreed as to the extent evil permeated Egyptian life. Each plague had to have been made up of **at least** four parts, because the evil did not just affect Egypt in a general and peripheral manner; it

penetrated and affected each one of its four components individually.

Explaining the Dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva

And here is where R. Eliezer and R. Akiva differ. R. Eliezer, who maintains that each plague consisted of four parts, is of the opinion that the impurity and evil of Egypt extended to each and every facet of Egyptian life. However, the evil did not extend to the **essence** of Egyptian existence. By destroying the four elements of evil that constitute the complete form and character of Egyptian life in all of its multifarious forms, evil, for all intents and purposes, would have been eradicated.

Rabbi Akiva, who maintains that each plague comprised five parts, is of the opinion that evil did indeed penetrate to the very core of Egyptian society. To rid Egypt of its evil, the plagues had to reach all five levels of Egyptian existence, to its very quintessential core.

How do we Apply the Two Approaches to Our Liberation?

This analysis can be translated into the method by which we liberate ourselves from our own spiritual paralysis, which parallels the Exodus from Egypt.

R. Eliezer's "four level" approach to getting rid of evil means that we must work on all conscious levels of our soul, making sure they are not paralyzed. This means that we must get our actions, attitudes, intellect and will-power, to not be contaminated with negative influences and to not stagnate. Doing that will suffice to destroy the stifling forces of Egypt and will usher in the final Redemption.

Accordingly, we need not concern ourselves with our essence; we can be secure that it is intact and unhampered by the numbing effects of the world around us.

R. Akiva, however, added that even when we feel that we are free, because we are in control of our conscious faculties, we are still not "out of the woods." Our soul's essence might still be in exile. To really get out of exile, spiritually and physically, R. Akiva maintains, one must search deeply into his/her soul and make sure that the essence is able to "breath" freely. Then the Exodus is complete and no part of us will remain in exile.

ESSAY NINETEEN

SYNTHESIS, NOT SIN-THESIS

Moses, who is known to us as the Giver of the Torah, represented the ultimate intellect.

His role was to think, probe and understand.

If Moses would have dismissed G-d's mysterious actions as being above the capacity of the human mind to grasp, he would have been remiss.

G-d expected of him to question and Moses did what came natural to him.

ESSAY NINETEEN

SYNTHESIS, NOT SIN-THESIS

Moses Disappointment

At the end of last week's Parsha, Moses' mission to Pharaoh seemed to have ended in a disastrous failure. Moses demanded that Pharaoh let the Israelites go so that they can serve G-d. Instead Pharaoh increases their oppression. Not only does he dismiss the proposal of giving them a little break, he now demands that they collect their own straw for the making of the bricks, without reducing the quota of bricks they had to produce.

Everyone, included Moses, was disturbed and disappointed. Moses, in fact, goes a step further. He actually protests G-d's actions by declaring:

> "L-rd! Why have you let so much evil come upon this people? Why did you send me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done more evil to this people; but you have not even delivered your people!"

G-d's Two Part Response

G-d's response is divided into two parts. At the end of last week's Parsha G-d simply states,

> "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand shall he send them away, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land."

This week's Parsha, *Vo'eira*, begins with G-d's second response to Moses. To paraphrase the response based on Rashi's interpretation, G-d rebukes Moses for having asked the question and for not being like the Patriarchs who did not ask questions but humbly accepted G-d's decrees even when they did not make sense to them.

At first glance, Rashi seems to be saying that G-d was displeased with Moses' protest. However, from a more profound view of what has happened here, it is clear that Moses was justified in his protest. Yet, G-d now expected Moses to reach an even higher level.

The Rebbe's Approach to Moses' Protest

The Rebbe explains that Moses protest was surely not a blasphemous act. G-d did not take him to task for blasphemy. On the contrary, Moses was to be commended for his profound love and concern for the Jewish people. He

could not tolerate their suffering. Moses was motivated by an extreme passion for his people, which was, of course, the reason why Moses was selected to be the liberator of the Israelites in the first place. As a faithful shepherd, Moses was expected to do what he did.

Moreover, Moses, who is known to us as the Giver of the Torah, represented the ultimate intellect. His role was to think, probe and understand. If Moses would have dismissed G-d's mysterious actions as being above the capacity of the human mind to grasp, he would have been remiss. G-d expected of him to question. And while there are instances where the human mind cannot fathom G-d's ways, Moses, however, felt that he was compelled by virtue of his G-d given intellectual ability, to probe, question and get to the bottom of why things had gotten worse. As a faithful leader possessed with a keen intellect, Moses did what came natural to him.

Difference between Moses and the Patriarchs

The Patriarchs, by contrast, were recognized for the emotional approach that they followed in serving G-d. Abraham was the ultimate man of kindness and love. Isaac was the personification of awe and reverence. And Jacob was a synthesis of Abraham and Isaac's manner of serving G-d. To be sure, they were also towering intellects; but that

was not the predominant feature of their personalities. They were primarily required to cultivate the emotional response to G-d, which does not feel the need to rationalize everything that G-d does.

On the contrary, the romantic appreciates and even savors the element of mystery in G-d and His ways. The Patriarchs therefore did not ask for explanations from G-d; because their task was to cultivate the romantic side of Judaism, which is total devotion, which precludes the role of constantly questioning G-d's ways.

Time for Moses and Us to Rise even Higher

In effect, the Rebbe explains, Moses was not faulted for his protest, but G-d was now challenging him to rise to a third and still higher level of spirituality that would allow him to reach the pinnacle of intellectual comprehension and still be capable of recognizing the transcendent and mysterious nature of G-d. Now that Moses was preparing the Jewish people for the Sinai experience, at which time heaven and earth were to "meet," he was expected to reach a higher level that allowed them to fuse intellect with emotion, logic with faith and nature with the supernatural. It was not a sin for Moses to have protested, but now Moses was deemed capable of synthesis.

Now that we are preparing for the imminent arrival of

Moshiach, the culmination of the process of synthesis that was begun at Sinai, it behooves us to express our Judaism in multifaceted and even paradoxical ways. We should not be content with either the emotional or intellectual approaches to Judaism, but seek to integrate the complete spectrum of human experiences in our quest to get closer to G-d.

ESSAY TWENTY

TEN PLAGUE THERAPY

One of the greatest obstacles to growth is the desire to make great strides, so that one can realize their goal quickly.

If one cannot rise to the top one is disappointed and frustrated.

In Judaism, however, the belief is that every little, incremental, action has cosmic value.

Once one has eliminated the obstacle of viewing small things with disdain, one can really begin to grow and creep out of the Egyptian morass.

ESSAY TWENTY

TEN PLAGUE THERAPY

Ten-Step Program

The Ten plagues were not just a punishment from G-d, but an educational experience. In order for the Egyptians—and the Jews—to appreciate the Ten Commandments that were to follow the Exodus, it was important that the barriers to appreciating the G-dly be removed.

Thus the Ten Plagues can be viewed as a ten-step program that chips away at those obstacles to spiritual growth. Most of our emotional problems can be dealt with effectively by integrating this Ten-Plague therapy into our lives.

First Step: Destroying False Icons

The first impediment to emotional and spiritual health is our belief in false icons. The first plague that turned the Nile River into blood was aimed at destroying the fallacious belief that the Nile was their true source of sustenance. In

our day and age there are an abundance of Nile Rivers, deities that we worship and glorify, such as the accumulation of money, power and fame.

However, when our dreams and aspirations prove elusive, we become depressed and all sorts of negative consequences ensue.

When we get rid of these false gods in our lives, we are on the road to healing because can now be receptive to the true meaningful things in our lives that bring genuine joy and fulfillment. .

This plague of blood that discredited the principle Egyptian deity parallels the first commandment: "I am the L-rd your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt." Only by denying the false icons can we be receptive to the true G-d and His positive system of values.

Second Step: Emotional Detachment

To simply discredit the false idols of modernity philosophically, would not suffice because one's attachment to these icons is usually based on emotional factors. Thus, the second plague, where the countless frogs emerged from their deity, the Nile, and swarmed through all of Egypt, making their lives unbearably disgusting, took their rejection of the false gods beyond the intellectual level.

They were now emotionally repulsed by the false deities.

This second plague parallels the second commandment of: "Do not have any other gods before Me," where the objective is total repudiation of idolatry, intellectually and emotionally.

Third Step: Every Small Step Counts

Having dispensed with the root of all evil—the belief and allegiance to false gods—the plague of lice followed. Our Sages tell us that whereas the other plagues were replicated by the Egyptian sorcerers, they could not create lice because their powers did not extend to minute things. The plague of lice demonstrated that for the true G-d there is nothing trivial or unimportant.

One of the greatest obstacles to growth is the desire to make great strides, so that one can realize their goal quickly. If one cannot rise to the top one is disappointed and frustrated. In Judaism, however, the belief is that every little, incremental, action has cosmic value. Once one has eliminated the obstacle of viewing small things with disdain, one can really begin to grow and creep out of the Egyptian morass.

This third plague parallels the third Commandment of: Do not bear G-d's name in vain." This commandment demands

of us to show true respect for G-d. When we appreciate how G-d is concerned with minute details of life, it is a true sign of reverence.

Dismissing G-d from everything but the most glamorous aspects of life, is a true sign that G-d does not matter in most of what we do.

And just as the plague of lice, albeit minuscule, covered the entire earth, so too, the small, seemingly unimportant aspects of life, actually cover all of the entire earth; they represent virtually every aspect of our lives.

Having rejected false ideals and gained appreciation for the little steps we take in our lives, we encounter one more formidable obstacle to growth. We cannot see our own uniqueness. We undersell ourselves and feel that we cannot really excel.

Fourth Step: We are Special

The fourth plague—Arov the mixture of animals that terrorized the Egyptians—miraculously, avoided entering any area inhabited by the Israelites. The Torah relates that this plague demonstrated how G-d mad a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians. This plague underscored the uniqueness of the Jewish people and their G-dly way of life.

Translated into therapeutic language, for us to grow, we have to appreciate that we are special and that the Egyptians (read: the stifling and disrupting aspects of our lives) do not define us We can rise above the negative within our personalities, because we are inherently positive.

Shabbos Makes us Feel Special

This fourth plague with its emphasis on the separation between the Israelite and the Egyptian, parallels the fourth Commandment to "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."

In this commandment the Torah stresses how it is a sign given to the Jewish people. It is our way of highlighting the unique spiritual qualities that we possess that separate us from the rest of the world and its activities. On Shabbat we are all royalty, standing head and shoulders above our weekday existence. It is no surprise then that Shabbat has been described as the most therapeutic experience.

Indeed, the Shabbat experience, the knowledge itself that we are special, in and of itself, is the first step in our liberation. Shabbat is thus a preview of the full experience of freedom that will characterize the future Redemption. To help prepare and facilitate the future Redemption, it would serve us well to focus on the lesson of the first four plagues; to repudiate all forms of idolatry, philosophically

and emotionally, appreciate the value of every minute G-dly gesture, and top appreciate one's unique identity as a Shabbat-Jew, one who is inherently free, even as he is still situated in exile awaiting the imminent arrival of Moshiach.

We will, G-d willing, discuss the other 6 plagues in the book "Light From the Future – Parshas Bo.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

The introduction of the counter intuitive perception of G-d's role in everything—began with Abraham and culminated with Sinai.

At Sinai the world was temporarily given a flash of lightning view of the reality of G-d's presence. But even after that flash dissipated, it left us with the potential to recreate the thunder and lightning of Sinai by way of Torah study and observance of the Mitzvos.

When we collectively perform a sufficient amount of Mitzvos—G-dly acts—the impact will be so great that it will permanently alter the consciousness of the world. Its default position will be the same position G-d Himself has in relation to the creation.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Moses had to Leave the City to Pray

At the end of this week's parsha, we read about the seventh plague G-d brought on Egypt—the plague of hail. Pharaoh pleaded with Moses to bring an end to this devastating plague and Moses complied. However, Moses added:

> "When I leave the city, I will spread my hands to G-d."

In other words, Moses offered to pray to G-d, but only after he would leave the city.

Rashi addresses the question why did he have to leave the city to pray to G-d? Couldn't he have prayed in Pharaoh's palace? Rashi's answer, based on the Midrash, is that the city was full of idols and Moses could not pray to G-d in the vicinity of these idols.

Rashi's answer, however, prompts a follow up question.

Why, in the earlier plagues—such as the plague of frogs—does the Torah not stress that he left the city to pray to G-d to stop the plague? Why is the plague of hail different?

Commentators answer that the plague of hail was so devastating that Pharaoh demanded its immediate cessation. Moses, therefore, had to inform him that he could not pray until he leaves the city. In the earlier plagues—that were not as devastating—Pharaoh did not express such anxiety, so there was no need to pray immediately. Hence he did not have to tell Pharaoh that he would have to wait until he leaves the city.

Isn't G-d All Over?

We can perhaps answer this question as to why he had to leave the city for this plague exclusively by first answering another more basic question:

Why did Moses have to leave the city to pray to G-d? Isn't G-d present even where there is idol worship? Is G-d closer to us in the countryside than He is in the city? Does the presence of a ridiculous icon have the power to offend G-d and drive Him away?

Ten Plagues: Educational Devices

The answer can be given in light of a deeper way we should understand the Ten Plagues. They were not intended simply as a punishment for the evil. Rather, the plagues were educational devices intended to expose the Egyptians and the Israelites to the existence of G-d and His providence. Each plague introduced them to another dimension of His power.

As the plagues continued, G-d's presence was becoming more and more apparent. Never before had the world been exposed to such G-dly light and energy.

The Need for the Sinai Experience

All of this was a prelude to the world's most momentous event and the greatest revelation of G-dliness—the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

What the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was to accomplish was to make our physical world receptive to G-d's presence. Prior to the giving of the Torah, G-d was certainly omnipresent. He filled all the space of the world. And there is no place, and there never was a place, devoid of Him. Creation did not in any way detract from G-d's pervasive presence in all aspects of existence. If the Torah had not been given the world from G-d's perspective would

not have been any different from the way it is now. As we say in our prayers:

> "You are the one before the world was created and You are the same one after the world was created."

Creation did not alter G-d's state in the same manner human creations alter their creator.

The question that follows then is: If the world has no effect on G-d, what did the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai achieve in terms of G-d's relationship with the world?

Sinai: Gave the Book the Identity of its Author

The answer is that the change is from our perspective. When G-d created us—which includes the entire universe—he designed it in a way that it would be naturally resistant to the recognition of its Divine author. The giving of the Torah at Sinai reversed that process. The world can now, of its own volition and ability, perceive the reality of its existence and translate that perception into all aspects of one's life. It is like saying, while the author knows the book he or she wrote, the book does not know its author. Sinai gave the "book" the capacity to appreciate its Author the way the Author knows the book.

However, this is a gradual process. The first step is for the world to simply recognize that it did not make itself. It

then has to veer away from seeking the secret of its existence in physical forms, such as worship of idols, or the celestial bodies and the forces of nature. The next step is for the person to realize that there is only one non-corporeal Creator who created everything. This realization is followed by the perception that the Creator is not bound by His own rules—the laws of nature. It then behooves us to translate these realizations into every fiber of our being. Every thought, word, or action should be permeated with the acknowledgement that there is one Transcendent G-d who is responsible for every facet of our existence.

Goal of Messianic Era: A Sane World

This process—the introduction of the counter intuitive perception of G-d's role in everything—began with Abraham and culminated with Sinai. At Sinai the world was temporarily given a flash of lightning view of the reality of G-d's presence. But even after that flash dissipated, it left us with the potential to recreate the thunder and lightning of Sinai by way of Torah study and observance of the Mitzvos.

When we collectively perform a sufficient amount of Mitzvos—G-dly acts—the impact will be so great that it will permanently alter the consciousness of the world. Its

default position will be the same position G-d Himself has in relation to the creation.

Indeed, this is what we believe is the ultimate goal of the Messianic Age. It is not just a time for world peace and prosperity, but it is a time when the world will become sane and perceptive. That, in turn, will guarantee that we will not revert to the Cain kills Abel syndrome that the world has experienced since the beginning of history.

We can now begin to appreciate the reason why Moses could not pray in the city where idolatry abounded. While G-d's presence is in no way altered by the presence of idols, **our** perceptions are indeed affected. The realization of G-d's singular presence in the world precludes any association with idols, if only to be in their proximity. G-d is not offended by these idols, but He wants us to be offended by them. It is comparable to one who keeps a photo of the person who killed your loved one that had been sent to us by the murderer. How can we feel comfortable in our relationship with G-d with the existence of idols in the world?

However, the discomfort at having idols in our midst is commensurate with our ability to perceive G-d's presence in our lives. When we attain a certain level of spiritual sophistication our revulsion at representations of evil and ungodly symbols in our midst also grows.

Seventh Plague: A Milestone in Revealing G-d's Existence

With the advent of the seventh plague a milestone in G-d revealing His existence, singularity and transcendence to the world was reached. With such a force of G-dly energy unleashed in the otherwise depraved Egypt, Moses—for the first time—had to respond by distancing himself from idolatry.

What didn't hurt in the earlier plagues—praying in the midst of idols, when G-d had not yet made His mark on the Egyptian landscape, for G-d is present everywhere and is not offended by their presence—would hurt now. Now that Egypt has "grown" in its perception of G-d's pervasive influence in the world, it became imperative to leave the city.

Two Cities

The above can be applied to our own lives:

A letter is a brick, says Sefer Yetzirah, the most ancient of Kabbalisitc works, and a word is a house. So a city is a collection of words and sentences containing structured ideas.

And there are two models of cities: There is what the Psalmists call "the city of our G-d" and there are cities that convey idolatrous ideas, such as the city the generation of

the Tower of Babel sought to build. Many of us are influenced by these "cities." They are the popular media that indoctrinate us into ways of thinking that are contrary to G-d and are anathema to those who reside in the "city of our G-d." At the very least, before reciting our prayers we have to emulate Moses and leave these "cities" by divesting ourselves from the secular and idolatrous ideas that insidiously fill the popular media that bombards us incessantly.

The closer we get to the final Redemption, at which time G-d's presence will be more and more pronounced, our challenge is to leave the city of Pharaoh and get ready to enter the "City of our G-d" both figuratively as well as literally.

(See Essay Six for an alternate approach)

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE TOMORROW SYNDROME

"Tomorrow" is the lexicon of exile.

The word "tomorrow" should not appear in our vocabulary when it comes to the end of pain and suffering or the end of exile.

When we hear someone saying "things will get better, but I don't want, care, or expect it to happen today" they've been infected with Pharaoh's "tomorrow" syndrome.

A Moshiach oriented person says, "today." I want Moshiach today! And I expect Moshiach today!

Our motto is "today," or as the children (and the innocent child within us) sing "We want Moshiach Now!"

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE TOMORROW SYNDROME

Pharaoh PhD

This week's parsha features seven of the Ten Plagues that were designed by G-d not just to punish the Egyptians but to educate them as well. Each plague would introduce Pharaoh and the Egyptian people to the existence of one omnipotent G-d and to an appreciation for the special relationship He has with the Jewish people. The ultimate goal, of course, was to translate their education into practice by allowing the Jewish people go so that they would be free to serve their G-d. But if that was the only goal, G-d could have accomplished it with but one massive plague. The fact that it took ten plagues to achieve His objective, added to the fact that it was G-d Himself Who hardened Pharoah's heart, proves that the plagues were also, if not primarily, an educational program.

The Ten Plagues were thus a ten semester course that would, in the end, grant the Egyptians a degree in theology, specializing in the subject of G-d's ability to change nature.

The very first plague of blood which affected the Nile River, Rashi says, was intended to strike at the river which was their god. What then was the purpose of the second plague, that of frogs, which also was related to the Nile from which the frogs emerged? Indeed this plague was initiated by G-d who tells Moses to instruct Aaron to strike the Nile just as he had done for the plague of blood. What theological lesson did the Egyptian ruler learn from this plague? If it discredited the Nile what did it add on to the first plague of blood which already accomplished that goal?

The Plague's Ending

The answer might lie in the way the plague ended. Pharaoh begs Moses to plead with G-d to remove this nuisance. Moses then asks him when he should he pray that the frogs disappear. Pharaoh's response is "tomorrow."

Rashi explains: "Pray today that they should cease tomorrow."

Now the reason Pharaoh did not want to see the plague stop immediately, commentators explain, was intended to test Moses to see if indeed his power was from G-d or perhaps, instead, Moses was some sort of magician. Pharaoh therefore told Moses an unexpected time for the plague to cease. If Moses could still stop the plague at his

appointed time this would indeed verify Moses' claim that it was a punishment from G-d and not a product of magic or some special knowledge of natural phenomena.

When it ceased precisely as Pharaoh was foretold it would—tomorrow—he was introduced to the knowledge that not only was it G-d Who was in command of starting a plague when He chose, but that He could also stop it at whichever time He wanted.

The theological lesson was that G-d's control over all of nature, including their vaunted idol, the Nile River, was subordinate to G-d's will, and that this subordination was absolute. G-d could start the process, and He could end it.

Jewish Education

The Ten Plagues were not just theological lessons for Pharaoh and the Egyptians; they were also intended to educate the Jewish people as to G-d's greatness, His love for them, and the way they had to prepare themselves to be freed from exile.

What lesson can we learn from the way this plague of frogs ended?

We can glean one lesson by first answering another question concerning the way Pharaoh asked for the plague to cease. As was mentioned above, Rashi states that

Pharaoh asked Moses to pray today that it ceases tomorrow. What difference would it make to Pharaoh when Moses prayed? He could just as well have prayed the next day that it cease then?

Watering Down the Effects of the Plague

One way of answering this question is to read Pharaoh's mind. Pharaoh wanted to diminish the effect this plague would have on the Egyptian people. If they would see how the plague would cease the very moment Moses finished praying that would prove to them that Moses was a G-dly man and that the plague was G-d's doing.

If, on the other hand, Moses would pray today, but the plague would not cease until tomorrow, the people would still remain skeptical as to the source of the plague. If G-d was so powerful, they would ask, why did it take a full day for the plague to end?

Pharaoh Mentality

There is an important lesson we can learn from this that can apply to our own unique situation as we are poised to leave the current exile and to enter the age of Redemption.

Pharaoh is the force that tries to keep us enslaved and ensconced in exile. Even when he sees the miracles that G-

d has performed he tries as hard as he can to inject doubts as to the true nature and origin of these miracles. One way Pharaoh accomplishes this feat is if the Jewish people grow skeptical when we do not see the immediate effects of all the signs that point to the fact that we are in the last moments of exile. If our prayers for the Redemption have the power to bring Moshiach, why hasn't it happened already? If the Rebbe told us unequivocally that "the time of your Redemption has arrived," why is the time of Redemption still not yielding the actual Redemption?

A Tale of Two Questions

And while we cannot give any rational answers to this question, we ought to know that this question can be phrased in two opposite ways. One way is desirable and constitutes the approach of Moses while the other plays into the hands of Pharaoh,

The first "kosher" form of the question must be directed to G-d. This is, in fact, what Moses did when things got worse after he spoke to Pharaoh as he was commanded to do, as recounted in the end of last week's parsha. Instead of things getting better for the Jews they got worse. G-d's promise, it seemed, did not materialize. Moses then complained to G-d as to why the Jews were not liberated immediately? Why did they suffer more as a result of his

going to Pharaoh? Why, now, is the Redemption not happening today? Why the "tomorrow?"

This is a legitimate way of raising the question. We have a right and indeed an obligation to say to G-d "*ad masai*-how much longer?!" How much longer do we have to wait for the promises we were given for the coming of Moshiach to take us out of exile? This demand is not a denial of G-d or of the message of Moses, and of the Moses of our generation to us; it is, rather, an affirmation of it. Our belief in the fulfillment of G-d's promise is so strong that we cannot possibly find any logical explanation for it not happening, and not happening today.

When Pharaoh and his ilk, however, raise the question, their version of it is intended to dampen our spirits and sows doubts into the very efficacy of our prayers and of the very fact that we will leave this exile imminently. Pharaoh wants to demoralize us with his questions so that instead we will prefer to remain in exile.

Today, Not Tomorrow!

There is another way we can explain Pharaoh telling Moses "tomorrow." This is the lexicon of exile. A Moshiach oriented person says, "today." I want Moshiach today! And I expect Moshiach today! As we say thrice daily in our most important prayer, "And for Your salvation I hope for every

day," which is understood to mean that I hope and anticipate that he will come today. When we hear someone saying "things will get better, but I don't want, care, or expect it to happen today" they've been infected with Pharaoh's "tomorrow" syndrome.

This explains why the Torah doesn't say when the plague actually ended. While we assume that it ended precisely as Moses told Pharaoh it would, and in fact Rashi says that he did actually pray that day that it would cease tomorrow, the Torah does not mention this explicitly. Perhaps it is the Torah's way of saying that the word "tomorrow" should not appear in our vocabulary when it comes to the end of pain and suffering or the end of exile. Our motto is "today," or as the children (and the innocent child within us) sing "We want Moshiach Now!"

TEN PLAGUE THERAPY

FOREWORD

With praise to the A-mighty, I am presenting the essay entitled "Ten Plague Therapy," in honor of the marriage of my beloved son Boruch Sholom שיחי' to his Kallah Naomi Rivkah תחי'.

The essay is divided into an introduction and ten chapters corresponding to the Ten Plagues.

The essay, as its name suggests, is an application of the Ten Plagues to our own spiritual and emotional development.

Each chapter explains one or several aspects of a specific plague and applies it to our own lives. It also shows the connection of each of the Ten Plagues to the Ten Commandments and the Ten Sefirot (Divine Attributes and soul faculties).

* * *

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times; on the threshold of the future Redemption. He applied the words of the Midrash that "The time of your Redemption has arrived." The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the

actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption.

In this spirit, a connection is drawn from each of the Ten Plagues to the Messianic Age and what we need to do to prepare for it.

* * *

It is my fervent hope that this essay—with its emphasis on Moshiach—will contribute to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is also my fervent hope that this essay, will add to the merit of my son Boruch Sholom שי' and daughter-in-law Naomi Rivkah תחי' on the occasion of their marriage, on the second of Nissan, 5767, and may they build a *bayis ne'man b'yisroel*, on the foundation of Torah and Mitzvot as they are illuminated by the the luminescence of Torah, the light of Chassidus— and may all the blessings of the Rebbe be fulfilled.

It is also my heartfelt hope and prayer that this effort at disseminating teachings about Moshiach will contribute to

the process of changing our *galut*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah. And may this effort, in turn, contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Why Ten Plagues?

Everyone is familiar with the Ten Plagues. These were the miraculous destructive forces that finally crushed the will of Pharaoh and brought him to his knees. At the end of these ten grueling and horrendous plagues, Pharaoh relented and let the Israelites go.

The first question that comes to mind is why **ten** plagues? Couldn't G-d have "convinced" Pharaoh to let the Jews go after the first plague? Why the need for ten plagues when one would have sufficed.

The question is even stronger when we consider the fact that G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would have to endure the punishment. He could not really change until G-d was ready for him to change. It is obvious that G-d wanted Pharaoh to endure ten plagues, no more and no less. This begs for an explanation.

An Educational Experience

In truth, as the Biblical text asserts, these plagues were not simply a punishment for Pharaoh and the Egyptian people; it was actually an educational system to introduce the Egyptians to the One G-d, His power and His love for the Jewish people

Our Sages have added another dimension to the Ten Plagues. They were not just for the Egyptians, but they served as an educational and spiritual experience for the Jewish people as well. And, indeed, we can apply these teachings to our own lives today.

It is therefore no coincidence that the number of plagues matches the number of commandments the Jewish nation heard at Sinai, just seven weeks after they departed from Egypt. The Ten Plagues, our Sages tell us, were a prelude to the Ten Commandments. These Ten Plagues were intended to bring both awareness and refinement to the Jewish nation so as to make them receptive to the Ten Commandments.

The Kabbalah of the Ten Plagues

On a deeper Kabbalistic level, our Chassidic Masters have explained that the number ten is rooted in the number of Divine emanations known as *Sefirot*. These Ten *Sefirot*, are the Divine instruments through which G-d channels His light and energy into our world.

Corresponding to these Ten *Sefirot* are the *Eser Kochot Hanefesh*, the ten faculties of the soul, through which our soul expresses its G-dly potentials.

The world was also created with Ten Utterances that originate in the Ten *Sefirot*. However, the nature of the world is that it conceals its Divine energy and source. Indeed, the Hebrew word for world is *olam* that means concealment.

When G-d gave the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai it empowered the Ten Utterances to reflect the Ten G-dly emanations.

Of all the places in the world, Egypt epitomized the greatest expression of concealment. The low spiritual state of Egypt is mentioned in the Torah, which refers to Egypt as "the shame of the earth." Indeed, even its Hebrew name *Mitzraim* expresses its unusually lowly state. This name is cognate to the Hebrew word *meitzarim,* which means straits.

Egypt was the most depraved land in the world; it was the most confining and concealing location.

Chipping Away at the Gross World One Step at a Time

In order for the world to become receptive to the Divine emanations that would be generated at Sinai with the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Ten Plagues were administered.

Every plague chipped away at the coarseness and grossness of Egypt, and by extension, the rest of the physical world. These plagues can be likened to the plowing before the sowing, or to use a military metaphor, "softening the enemy before the invasion."

The Ten plagues thus enabled the Ten Commandments to infiltrate the Ten Utterances, so that they could reveal their true G-dly nature and source within the Ten *Sefirot*.

To summarize: The Ten Plagues were not just for punishment; they were an integral part of the process to help refine the world and prepare it for *Mattan Torah*-The Giving of the Torah.

In simple language, the Ten Plagues were an educational experience. In order for the Egyptians to appreciate G-d and for the Jews to appreciate G-d's special message to them that would be delivered at Sinai following the Exodus, it was imperative that the barriers to appreciating the G-dly be removed.

Treating the Soul

What is true about the world at large, that it needed these Ten Plagues to refine it, is also true about the miniature world.

As mentioned before, the soul comprises Ten Faculties that derive from and parallel the Ten *Sefirot*. And as the Ten *Sefirot* are prevented from expressing their G-dly light because of the obstructive nature of the physical world, similarly, the soul's G-dly light cannot shine because of the coarse nature of the body and the unrefined character of our animal soul.

Because the soul cannot fully express itself in our lives, we experience all sorts of spiritual and emotional problems.

In general, the observance of the Mitzvot and the study of Torah help to refine our bodies and animal souls. However, there are times when we are so spiritually and emotionally drained that even our Mitzvot are dry, mechanical, lacking enthusiasm, and do not allow the light that they generate to shine through them. It is at this point that the Torah provides us with the proper therapy.

Just as the world needed the Ten Plagues to remove the resistance of the world to the Divine energies it contains, so too, we need to implement the "Ten Plague therapy" to deal with our own resistant nature so that the light of the soul can shine through us.

Thus the Ten Plagues can be viewed as a ten-step program that chips away at those obstacles to spiritual and emotional growth. Most of our emotional problems can be

dealt with effectively by integrating this Ten-Plague therapy into our lives.

CHAPTER ONE
THE FIRST STEP: BLOOD
DESTROYING ICONS

Modern Day Icons

The first impediment to emotional and spiritual health is our belief in false icons. The first plague that turned the Nile River into blood was aimed at destroying the fallacious belief that the Nile was their true source of sustenance.

In our day and age there are an abundance of Nile Rivers; deities that we worship and glorify, such as the accumulation of money, power, fame and entertainment. While we hardly think of these aspects of life as deities—we do not pray to them—we do depend on them for our subsistence and we are ready to go to extremes for them.

When our dreams and aspirations prove elusive we become depressed and all sorts of negative consequences ensue. When our dependence on all of the above does not come through for us we are shattered.

People who win the lottery and discover that it contributed nothing to their happiness—often the reverse is true—are devastated.

This does not mean that wealth is bad and that everyone who is affluent suffers from depression. It does suggest that people who glorify money and for whom it is the ultimate dream are suffer from a delusion that will prove painful in the end.

Once a person worships the false gods, they are vulnerable, and they set themselves up for all sorts of negative experiences such as depression, anxiety and anger.

The first step in our emotional and spiritual growth is to get rid of the false gods that dominate our lives. Recognize that our salvation does not come from money and power. Our sense of happiness does not come from either of these or from perpetual entertainment and pursuit of pleasure.

This is first step in the healing process that is represented by the plague of blood. When implemented in our own lives, we are on the road to recovery.

Connection to the First Commandment

As stated in the introduction, the Ten Plagues are said to parallel the Ten Commandments. It follows then that the first plague of blood that discredited the principal Egyptian deity parallels the first commandment: "I am the L-rd your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt."

What is the connection between the plague of blood and the awareness that it was G-d who took us out of the Land of Egypt?

Only by denying the false icons can we be receptive to the true G-d and His positive system of values that negate the depraved values of Egypt that enslave us and prevent us from experiencing true emotional and spiritual freedom.

The Plague of Blood and the Mikveh

According to the Midrash, this plague of blood, where the waters of the Nile turned into blood, was a punishment for the Egyptians because they prevented the Jews from immersing in a Mikveh. A Mikveh is a ritual bath that is an integral part of a spiritual purification process that is a part of Jewish family life.

The Mikveh is indispensable for intimacy in the marriage, and the absence of the Mikveh makes it impossible for husband and wife to procreate. This was precisely the intent of the Egyptian authorities; to prevent procreation and thereby drastically reduce the Jewish population in Egypt.

What connection is there between this plague in terms of its therapeutic value and the function of the purifying waters of a Mikveh?

The process of purification in a Mikveh occurs when the person who is need of spiritual purification immerses himself or herself in the waters of the Mikveh. Being entirely enveloped in the Mikveh is what effects the purification process. If even one hair is left out of the Mikveh, the purification process does not follow.

The word for total immersion is *tevilah.* This word, when rearranged, forms the Hebrew word *habitul*, which means the state of being nullified, as the person who immerses himself or herself is completely enveloped and encompassed by the waters of the Mikveh.

Water is a symbol of knowledge. When the Egyptians threw the Jewish boys in the Nile River their intent was also symbolic. They wanted that the Israelites be completely enveloped by the Egyptian deities. They wanted to negate the idea of being enveloped by the pure and holy waters; the knowledge of one G-d.

By transforming the blood into water, the Jewish People witnessed how the source and symbol of Egyptian culture—the source of all the spiritual and emotional problems—was undermined. Their deity was not trustworthy and reliable. Upon realizing this they had the motivation to search for the true knowledge.

Divine Attribute: Malchut

As stated in the introduction, the Ten Plagues parallel the Ten *Sefirot*, the Ten Divine Attributes.

The first plague of blood corresponds to the tenth attribute of *Malchut*, which translates as royalty. Royalty commands total devotion and subservience.

The Egyptians treated the Nile as their Deity and totally surrendered themselves to it, until the plague of blood, which turned them, and the Jewish People, in another direction—towards the idea of submission to and total immersion in the pure waters (read: knowledge and awareness of G-d) of the Mikveh.

The first step in the direction of true freedom is recognition of and subservience to a Higher Authority

The Connection to Moshiach

The prophet declares: "As in the days of your departure from Egypt I will show him wonders." Since the Ten Plagues were the instruments to facilitate the Exodus from the first exile and prepare them for the Ten Commandments, it follows that the same Ten Plagues, in one form or another, have relevance to the future Redemption as well, and that the Ten Step program

conveyed by these Ten Plagues are crucial for the realization of the Redemption.

The plague of blood that was a reaction to the abolition of Mikveh is directly related to the Messianic Age. The prophet Isaiah characterizes that age as a time when the entire world will be immersed in a Mikveh of G-dly knowledge: "And the earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the water covers the sea."

* * *

Therapy: One must get to the root of their spiritual problem. One must first get rid of the icons of our secular culture that we depend on and worship before any therapy can work. First plague was to demonstrate that the Nile River is not the real source of life. In our own lives there are many Nile Rivers, things that we worship such as money, power, entertainment etc. We first have to recognize that these do not give us life. One must take one's idols and realize that they are not real. Icons stand in the way of our ability to change. We have to be wary of immersing and submerging (read: nullifying) ourselves in the wrong waters as a prerequisite to the immersion in a proper Mikveh, both literally and figuratively. .

CHAPTER TWO
THE SECOND STEP: FROGS
EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT

Frogs Everywhere!

The Second plague was frogs. The Torah and Midrash, describe in vivid detail how the frogs entered into every nook and cranny. When they ate, a frog would jump into their mouths. They were in their kitchens and in their bedrooms. They created unbearable noise with their croaking.

Unlike the plague of blood, there was no escape from the repulsive frogs. In the plague of blood, the Torah relates how they could dig new wells to procure untainted water. Only the Nile was affected. In this plague of frogs, however, they were everywhere.

Philosophy Not Enough

To simply discredit the false idols of modernity philosophically, it would not suffice. One's attachment to these icons is usually based on emotional factors not on philosophy or logic. People become attached to various fads and icons even when they know how devoid they are of any substance. Even when they know intellectually that

these icons are useless they will not be able to sever their ties with them.

How does one change? If we have become emotionally attached to something, the only way to detach ourselves is by experiencing a reverse emotion.

For example, if one becomes attached to an unsavory individual, simply knowing that he or she is bad for him or her will not suffice to extricate oneself from this person. By creating a dependency on him or her they will gain control over the other as we have seen recently in kidnapping situations.

Only when the dependent individual experiences a profound emotional trauma as a result of the person upon who he or she is dependent can there be hope that they may muster the courage to escape. Drug addicts and alcoholics have to hit the bottom before they will go for help.

The same can be said for our dependencies on all the various fads and icons. Even if we know of their danger to us we cannot easily sever our ties with them. The only truly effective way we can wean ourselves off of them is to have a negative emotional experience related to that icon.

Thus, the second plague—where countless frogs emerged from their deity, the Nile, and swarmed through all of Egypt, making their lives unbearably disgusting—took their

rejection of the false gods beyond the intellectual level. They were now also emotionally repulsed by the false deities.

Now that they were emotionally distanced from the Nile River, it was easier for them to recognize that the Nile could not possible be a G-d.

Similarly, when we reflect on the repulsive nature of some of the things to which we become so strongly attached, we are one step closer to rejecting all of these icons and getting closer to healing. Without feeling the stifling and debilitating effects of these fads and icons, we are not free to advance the healing process to the next level.

Parallels Second Commandment

The first two commandments essentially make the same case for G-d's exclusivity. The first one is in the affirmative, "I am the L-rd your G-d," and the second one puts it in the negative form: "Do not have nay other gods." Yet the fact that there was a need for two commandments to say essentially the same thing proves that there is an important difference between them.

It may be suggested that the first commandment—notwithstanding the fact that it also implies that there is only one G-d—it is nevertheless a statement that is

philosophical in nature. This commandment focuses on the fact that "I am the L-rd your G-d," and that only He is the source of your freedom. Implicit in this statement is the rejection of any other gods; that they are not capable of liberating us. This commandment appeals to our sense of understanding.

By contrast, the second commandment that explicitly negates idolatry was intended to denigrate the very notion of idolatry. They are called "other gods," which Rashi explains means that they are helpless and act as strangers (other) to their worshippers. By describing them this way, we are helped to feel the revulsion of idol worship.

This second plague of frogs—which made their deity, the Nile River, seem so disgusting—parallels the second commandment of: "Do not have any other gods before Me," where the objective is total repudiation of idolatry not just intellectually, but also emotionally.

Forced Labor with Insects

According to the Midrash, the plague of frogs was a punishment for the Egyptians because they forced the Jews to carry insects. This, they did presumably, to not only torture them physically, but to also torture them emotionally by making their work disgusting. Lest they begin to derive some enjoyment from their labor, the

Egyptians sought to deny them any pleasure and satisfaction.

Moreover, for the Israelite slaves, there was nothing else in their lives besides labor. Even the minimal satisfaction knowing that they accomplished something they wanted to deny them, by making every minute of work repulsive.

Thus, when G-d sought to punish them—measure for measure—He also made their lives disgusting, and more importantly, made the Nile River—around which all of their lives revolved—repugnant.

Divine Attribute: Yesod

According to Kabbalah, the second plague corresponds to the Divine attribute of *Yesod*. This attribute represents the trait of bonding. The objective of the second plague of frogs was to sever the bond with their most precious icon—the Nile River.

As long as their rejection of the Nile was cerebral it did not sever their bond with this deity. It had to be a plague that reversed their emotional ties that was capable of severing that bond. The revulsion they experienced succeeded in doing just that.

In our lives, we have to find ways of detaching ourselves from those things to which we cling. Severing the bond

from the debilitating and imprisoning influences of the material world is the second step in the process of healing.

Needless to stress, this does not mean that we have to sever our ties with the physical and material aspects of life. It does mean that we are to sever our sense of loyalty, dependency and adoration of these things. We ought to reserve our bonding powers—our faculty of *yesod*—for matters of holiness and goodness.

The Connection to Moshiach

Before Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, evil existed. But there was no bonding with it. Only after they violated G-d's command and they ingested the forbidden fruit did they develop more than just an attraction to the physical world and its temptations; they started to bond to it.

Throughout the thousands of years since that time, we have been engaged in a process of separation, or divestiture. We are divesting ourselves from this bond.

In the Messianic Age this process will be complete. And while, initially, evil will still exist; it will not be something to which we will bond. Once we reach that milestone, we will be on the road to completely eradicating all traces of evil in ourselves and throughout the world.

* * *

Therapy: Sometimes it is not enough to show that the idol we worshipped cannot help us. We must be convinced that is these false gods and dependencies are utterly contemptible. The frogs that came out of the Nile invaded every aspect of Egyptian life and made everything disgusting. One must recognize that one's icon and false dependents are utterly objectionable. We must develop a sense of antipathy towards them and sever our ties with them.

CHAPTER THREE
THE THIRD STEP: LICE
SMALL IS BIG

Could Not Replicate

After the first two plagues they were treated to a plague—the plague of lice—that proved impossible for them to replicate unlike the first two. They were forced to admit that this was the "finger of G-d."

Having dispensed with the root of all evil—the belief and allegiance to false gods—the plague of lice followed.

Our Sages tell us that the reason that they could not replicate this plague specifically was because their powers did not extend to minute things. The powers of magic extend only to things that are no smaller than a "barleycorn."

What is the reason that G-d's superior abilities were demonstrated by the creation of something that is small? There are countless other things that only G-d could do. And if G-d so chose, He could have prevented the sorcerers from replicating any of the other plagues as well.

Nothing Trivial

There is a powerful lesson in this fact that only G-d commands the minuscule domains of existence that will answer the question why He chose to demonstrate this ability at this juncture.

The lesson is simple and straightforward. The plague of lice demonstrated that for the true G-d there is nothing trivial or unimportant.

For a finite being there is a difference between big and small. For G-d who is infinite, big is no more impressive than small and small can be as important as big if it is G-d's will.

One of the greatest obstacles to growth is the obsession with major accomplishments and the desire to make great strides. We are so goal oriented that we have no patience to wait. Significant progress must be made in order for us to feel satisfied. If we fail to rise to the top quickly it will cause us disappointment and frustration.

In Judaism, however, the belief is that every little, incremental, action has cosmic value. We should never underestimate the small gestures. Every positive action has intrinsic value as well as its ripple effect that can literally change the entire world.

One Gesture Saved the World

The Rebbe so eloquently and passionately demonstrated this fact and proved it from the Biblical narrative concerning Joseph when he was "doing time" in prison. Joseph's asked Pharaoh's butler and baker—his fellow inmates—why they were depressed. This gesture of kindness and concern literally saved the entire world from starvation. When Joseph successfully interpreted their dreams, the butler—years later—informed Pharaoh about Joseph's dream interpreting ability. Joseph then interpreted Pharaoh's dream that portended seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. He then provided Pharaoh with the solution to the impending famine by recommending that he store food in the seven years of plenty.

Had Joseph not performed the simple act of kindness to his fellow prisoners, Pharaoh's dream would have never been interpreted and the food would never have been stored in time for the famine that would have devastated the world.

This then is the message of the third plague. With one seemingly insignificant act we can change the world.

We can now appreciate how the third plague takes us to the next level in our recovery. After intellectually and emotionally destroying the icons and institutions that we

feel dependent on and which drag us down, the next step is to make small steps forward.

The greatest obstacle for our emotional and spiritual development is the sense—as the Egyptian magicians believed—that there is no value in the small things.

Once we have eliminated the obstacle of viewing small things with disdain, one can really begin to grow and creep out of the Egyptian morass.

Another parallel between the third plague of lice and our emotional development can be seen in the fact that the plague of lice, albeit minuscule, covered the entire earth, so too, the small, seemingly unimportant aspects of life, actually cover all of the entire earth—they pervade virtually every aspect of our lives.

Upon reflection it becomes evident that most of our lives are filled with the small things. Only sporadically do we get involved in some major undertaking. That alone should prove that G-d cares about the details and perhaps even they represent the most significant part of our lives.

Parallels Third Commandment

This third plague parallels the third commandment of: "Do not bear G-d's name in vain." This commandment demands of us to show true respect for G-d. One can acknowledge

the existence of one G-d and even have contempt for idolatry, but yet, it is still possible for the person to lack in his or her reverence for G-d.

Saying G-d's name in vain is a sign that while we acknowledge His existence and even totally repudiate the existence of any other deity, our reverence for Him is lacking.

When one appreciates how G-d is concerned with minute details of life, it is a true sign of reverence. Dismissing G-d from everything but the most glamorous aspects of life is a true sign that G-d does not matter in most of what we do, akin to the person who mentions His name needlessly.

The Midrash states that the third plague of lice was a punishment for the Egyptians who forced the Jews to sweep dusty streets. Their dust now turned into lice.

The idea of sweeping away the dust is an expression of how dust has no real value and could be swept away. Their punishment was—measure for measure—the realization that trivial matters do count.

Divine Attribute: *Hod*

According to Kabbalah, the third plague corresponds to the Divine Attribute of *hod*-submission, acknowledgement or an expression of gratitude. When a person passes someone

and doesn't say "good morning" it is a sign that the other person does not count. Acknowledging another means that we don't trivialize them.

This trait also involves our appreciation for everything that G-d does for us.

A person, who does not value the trivial matters in life, will never acknowledge the good that he received and will not be able to submit to another. Sweeping dusty streets was their way of devaluing the people. Devaluation is the opposite of *hod*.

Connection to Moshiach

Maimonides rules that we are to view all of the world as if it is on a scale with the good and evil evenly balanced. One good deed can tip the scales and bring salvation to the entire world. In other words—as the Rebbe has repeatedly told us—with but one small Mitzvah we can bring Moshiach and the final Redemption.

That one deed can do it is based on two considerations: First, good is cumulative. If we have critical mass we can break through the barrier of exile. It could be that one Mitzvah that will push us over the top. Second, each Mitzvah has infinite value and can change the world for the good.

Moreover, when we are in exile we cannot fathom the importance of every detail. Only in the days of Moshiach will the infinite value of every detail of Torah and Mitzvot be fully appreciated.

Therapy: For a person to alter their traits and grow they must be prepared to make small changes. They may never underestimate the value of every good thought, word and especially deed. G-d cares about the insignificant aspects of life. We count, and every action of ours and others counts.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE FOURTH STEP: AROV*-MIXTURE OF WILD ANIMALS DON'T UNDERSELL YOURSELF*

No Wild Animals in Goshen

The fourth plague known as *arov* involved a mixture of wild animals coming together to terrorize the Egyptian populace. It was more than a nuisance, it was absolutely terrifying. Only in Goshen, where the Jews lived, there were no wild animals running loose.

How do we translate this in terms of our emotional and spiritual development?

Having rejected false ideals (both intellectually and emotionally), and gained appreciation for the little steps we take in our lives, we encounter one more formidable obstacle to growth. We cannot see our own uniqueness. We undersell ourselves and feel that we cannot really excel.

In a way, this is the opposite challenge of the preceding one of lice. There, it was explained, the fear is that we will dismiss the baby-steps and the small gestures. In this fourth step of our Ten-Plague therapy, the emphasis is on dispelling the notion that we can only do the small things; that we can never truly achieve distinction and greatness.

Uniqueness of the Jewish People

Where do we see this false and debilitating attitude attacked in the fourth plague?

The fourth plague—*arov* the mixture of animals that terrorized the Egyptians—miraculously, avoided entering any area inhabited by the Israelites. The Torah relates that this plague demonstrated how G-d made a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians. This plague underscored the uniqueness of the Jewish people and their G-dly way of life.

Insofar as the preceding three plagues, there are classical commentators that maintain that they did afflict the Israelites as well as the Egyptians. Even according to the dissenting view—that none of the plague affected the Jews—nevertheless, the first place the Torah explicitly states that there was no plague amongst the Jews was with respect to the fourth plague.

Translated into therapeutic language: For us to grow we have to appreciate that we are special and chosen. We must recognize our spiritual assets; our G-dly soul.

It is also crucial that we realize that the Egyptians (read: the stifling and disrupting aspects of our lives) do not define us. Even when we seem to have been adversely influenced by the Egyptian way of life hope is not lost. We

can certainly rise above the negative within our personalities, because we are inherently positive.

When we realize how we possess a G-dly soul and that we were chosen to be G-d's messengers to the rest of the world, how could we entertain the notion that we have any intrinsic limits? No matter how frightening and daunting the terrain in which we are thrust appears, we know that the spiritually hostile elements cannot harm us or deter us, for there is an inherent difference between us and the rest of the world.

According to the Midrash this plague was a punishment for the Egyptians who forced the Jews to bring wild animals for entertainment. This practice of bringing a mixture of wild animals represented the antithesis of the separation between the Israelites and the Egyptians. The mixture was a symbolic way of expressing that there was no difference between Jew and Egyptian. After all, even though these were different animals they still came as a mixed group. They were intimating that all peoples are essentially wild animals and that they are essentially inseparable.

By bringing the plague of the mixture of wild animals on the Egyptians that separated between the Israelites and the Egyptians, it was a form of poetic Justice. Even the **mixture**

of wild animals respected the **separation** between the Jews and Egyptians!

Parallels the Fourth Commandment

This fourth plague with its emphasis on the separation between the Israelite and the Egyptian peoples parallels the fourth Commandment to "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."

In this commandment the Torah stresses how it is a sign given to the Jewish people. It is our way of highlighting the unique spiritual qualities that we possess that separate us from the rest of the world and its activities.

Indeed, we conclude the Shabbat by reciting the *havdalah*-separation service, in which we highlight the separation between the week days and the Sabbath as well as the difference between Israel and the other nations. In other words, the Shabbat is supposed to instill in us pride in what and who we are. Shabbat is different and unique; so too, are we.

On Shabbat we are all royalty, standing head and shoulders above our weekday existence. It is no surprise then that Shabbat has been described as the most therapeutic experience.

Indeed, the Shabbat experience, the knowledge itself that we are special, in and of itself, is the first step in our liberation.

Divine Attribute – *Netzach*

Netzach is usually translated as Victory. But it also expresses the soul's desire to persevere, even against the odds and formidable obstacles.

In order to win the war against evil one must have a desire to win the war and know that they can win. To have this knowledge one must possess a healthy self (read: G-dly soul) esteem. We must appreciate our inherent superiority over evil.

When the Torah speaks of how the Jews would go out to war, it describes the war as one that they fought "on their enemy" not "against" their enemy. Chassidic commentators explain that when we fight against evil we must always consider ourselves above it.

Connection to Moshiach

Shabbat is thus a preview of the full experience of freedom that will characterize the future Redemption.

Redemption is about standing tall. Redemption is when we will appreciate our uniqueness and the entire world will not only not oppose and hinder us, but will go out of their way to assist us in our spiritual efforts.

To help prepare and facilitate the future Redemption, it would serve us well to focus on the lesson of the first four plagues; to repudiate all forms of idolatry, philosophically and emotionally, appreciate the value of every minute G-dly gesture, and to appreciate one's unique identity as a Shabbat-Jew, one who is inherently free, even as he is still situated in exile awaiting the imminent arrival of Moshiach.

* * *

Therapy: one must be able to separate between the good and the evil. One should not want to change the good traits. Create a sense of separation between the Jewish part of you, and the alien part. Know that you are unique and chosen. Get "in touch" with your G-dly soul. Just knowing you are different helps to protect you from harm.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE FIFTH STEP: DEVER-*PESTILENCE*
THE HOLY ANIMAL

Two Types of Animal Souls

The plague of *dever*-pestilence was the first to actually do more than just serve as a nuisance or a source of fright, but it killed their livestock, a major source of income; it put a dent in their economy.

Furthermore, the Torah underscores that this plague distinguished between Jews and Egyptians. The animals of the Jews did not succumb to the plague of pestilence.

This was an even greater miracle than in the preceding plague of *arov*. It is not as great a wonder that wild animals did not invade Goshen as much as the fact that the epidemic that killed animals did not spread to Jewishly owned animals even if they were together with Egyptian owned animals.

What does this mean in terms of our development?

After having destroyed our relationship with the icons that we worship (represented by the plagues of blood and frogs, respectively, which came out of the Nile, the river the Egyptians deified), and having recognized the idea that small, incremental steps are cherished by G-d (symbolized

by the plague of lice, the tiny creatures that only G-d was able to create and not Pharaoh's sorcerers), and after realizing our special relationship with G-d (exemplified by the plague of the mixture of wild animals that affected the Egyptians and not the Israelites), the fourth plague takes us a step further.

Not only is it important for us to realize that there is a holy side to our personality that is distinguishable from our unholy ("Egyptian") part, it is equally important to appreciate that even the animal within us consists of two dimensions, and one of these dimensions is also unique and should be appreciated for its uniqueness.

There is one aspect of our animal nature that **cannot** be salvaged. The part of us that is destructive, spiteful, and hateful, to cite a few examples, must be eliminated. But the parts of our animal nature such as self-interest, jealousy, pride, desire for pleasure, etc. can and must be harnessed for the good.

And while it would seem far more appropriate to cultivate our G-dly soul's sense of altruism and quest for the spiritual, the only way we can get there is by allowing our "animal" to feel that there is good in spiritual pursuits because they satisfy our selfish interests as well.

When jealousy motivates us to learn more and do more good for the world that is a stepping stone to doing good for its own sake.

When we use our pride to develop the requisite strength to resist temptation, or to stand up to the plate and meet challenges, it is the good animal in us that makes us do the right thing.

When our pursuit of pleasure leads us to savor the incredible joy and pleasure in Torah study—this is the holy animal in us expressing itself.

Hence, in the fifth plague of *dever*, G-d struck the **Egyptian** animals but not those of the Israelites. By absolutely rejecting the Egyptians' animals and simultaneously lending support to the positive side of our animal nature we are capable of getting off the ground and on our way out of the stifling environment of Egypt.

As long as we feel the dichotomy between the G-dly—and noble part of our personality—and the animal and more base part, we will always feel conflicted. And a person who is struggling will be less capable of developing a healthy self-esteem needed for emotional and spiritual growth.

Punishment for Disrupting Family Life

The Midrash relates that this plague that devastated their animal population was a punishment for the Egyptians

because they disrupted Jewish family life by forcing their Israelite slaves to go to deserts as shepherds. Their punishment thus was the loss of their animals.

The area where our animal soul's positive and holy desires are most pronounced is in the area of family life.

The Talmud relates that when the prophets and sages realized how destructive the evil impulse for idol worship had been in the days of the first Temple, they prayed to G-d to eliminate the passion that people had for idolatry. G-d acceded to their request.

Upon realizing that they succeeded in removing a major obstacle in the Jewish Nation's spiritual life, they were emboldened to petition G-d to remove the impulse for immoral behavior as well. G-d acceded to their request, temporarily, that caused all procreation of all species to be halted.

They then realized that while the impulse for idolatry was inherently and thoroughly evil and had to be removed, the impulse for intimacy can and must be harnessed for the good.

Parallel to the Fifth Commandment

This fifth plague can thus be said to parallel the Fifth Commandment of honoring our parents.

In the narrowest sense, parents are our providers and honoring them is a way to guarantee that we are taken care of. It is a prime example of how serving a higher authority can be motivated and reinforced by self-interest.

In a broader context, the entire structure of the family—with a father and mother at its head—is designed to create a self-contained and self-centered institution for doing good. In the aggregate, all these institutions are what provide for a stable and good world. The family ultimately becomes the stepping stone to selfless efforts on behalf of those who are outside of our immediate family and community.

Once we have destroyed the false icons, appreciated the value of every effort, and built up our self-esteem (by realizing the uniqueness of our G-dly soul, and that even our animal side has positive energy that can and should be harnessed for the good), we are ready for "tough love." We are ready for the educational aspect of the sixth plague of boils.

Divine Attribute - Tiferet

According to the teachings of Kabbalah this plague is related to the Divine Attribute of *Tiferet*, translated as beauty and is associated with the trait of harmony and compassion.

The connection to the plague of Pestilence can be understood in light of the foregoing analysis.

When we have a dichotomous existence; when our G-dly and animal souls go in different directions, either by shunning our animal soul or feeling contempt for the animal soul, it is neither beautiful nor harmonious. For harmony to exist we must learn how to bring the two souls together by getting the animal soul to pursue positive goals for its own selfish reasons. Beauty exists—Chassidic thought stresses—only when there is a blend of different colors and hues.

A person who has only one soul functioning properly is not expressing the faculty of beauty. It requires the synthesis of both the G-dly and animal souls.

Connection to Moshiach

One of the most famous prophecies concerning the Messianic Age is about how the animals will live together in harmony and peace and that they will also live together with humans in harmony and peace. Whereas the animal—and the animal soul within—is a mixed bag; there are some very positive aspects to our animal soul, as stated, and there are also some very ugly aspects.

In the Messianic Age, the "animal" will retain only its positive aspects, enabling it to enjoy a totally harmonious relationship with the G-dly soul.

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Therapy: Recognize that while the animal nature is the enemy within you and you must therefore tackle your animal nature, but you must distinguish between the "Egyptian animals" and the "Israelite animals." Not all animal drives are bad. Bring harmony and beauty to your life.

CHAPTER SIX
THE SIXTH STEP: SHECHIN-*BOILS TOUGH LOVE*

Boils: Miracles

The plague of Boils was the first of the second half of plagues, and it was the first plague to actually afflict their bodies. One of the obvious miracles recorded in the Torah concerning this plague is that that the ashes that Moses threw upwards caused boils in all of Egyptian people.

Whereas one never sees the source of an epidemic, here it was clear that the source was miraculous. Furthermore, in the preceding plagues, there were living organisms that did the damage that proved G-d's dominion over the animals. Here it was an inanimate object that caused the plague. The increased harshness and miraculous nature of this plague points to another more intense tier of therapy when we apply this to our own development.

Tough Love

In the context of self-development and emotional and spiritual growth, the most salient feature of this plague was that it was the first plague that actually struck the very bodies of the Egyptians. It disfigured their bodies and caused them incredible pain.

Their incapacitation as a result of this plague went so far that the Torah testifies, "[They] could not stand before Moses."

Figuratively, this plague is about demolishing our "Egyptian" body, which is a metaphor for the entire thought structure and Weltanschauung that derives from our environment and that ultimately is what defines who we are.

If we were to ask ourselves, who are we, the answer would be, we are composite of our inborn faculties and talents, as well as our passions and thought processes. However, that would be an incomplete answer. We are actually a composite of all of the above plus all the influences to which we've been exposed. In other words, we are defined not by who we are at the time of our creation, but what we've developed into by virtue of our upbringing, our environment, our culture and, of course, the media.

Before we rebuild a new and healthy structure, we must divest ourselves of the "Egyptian" influence, which is systemic, and which defined the Israelite slaves, and which therefore threatens our very existence. And whereas the first two plagues destroyed their icon, this "second first" plague was directed against their entire thought structure.

This is alluded to in the aforementioned verse that describes the way the plague of boils affected the Egyptian

magicians: "and the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils." This plague sought to deconstruct the Egyptian template.

According to the Midrash, this plague was a punishment for the Egyptians for forcing the Jews to heat bathing water for them.

Bathing was a way of pampering their bodies. The term body here, as mentioned, is a metaphor for the person's entire thought structure and way of life. The Egyptians sought to have the Israelites contribute to the advancement and enhancement of their way of life. It was therefore a fitting punishment for their bodies to be disfigured. Their way of life had undergone a complete reorientation and restructuring.

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Divine Attribute: Gevurah

This process of tough love—of ripping down our existing structure with the intention of reconstruction—is clearly a function of the attribute and faculty of *gevurah*, which is associated with, and is the source of judgment and severity, However, even G-d's attribute of judgment is ultimately for the purpose of kindness and growth.

Parallels Sixth Commandment

This plague is therefore the parallel of the Sixth Commandment "Do not murder" because like murder that destroys the entire person, the individual who is afflicted with the Egyptian mindset has effectively allowed it to destroy his entire system. And as it is forbidden to murder someone it is forbidden to break those elements that structure their life, unless, of course, it is in the context of the Ten Plague therapy administered in the proper way.

On a deeper level, the very existence of an Egyptian Weltanschauung is an act of spiritual murder. Murder is described in the Book of Genesis as the "shedding of blood of a person in a person," which Chassidic sources interprets to mean draining the energy from the "G-dly image" of the G-dly soul into the "other" soul.

The plague of boils removed the life from the "other" soul, thereby restoring the life back to its rightful place—the G-dly soul.

For this plague-therapy to be effective, however, it had to be preceded by the previous five. One should never "demolish" someone else's structure, even if their structure was deleterious to them, without first shoring them up so that they can take absorb the blows to their system. In addition, before administering tough love one has to put in

place a back-up, replacement system that provides positive reinforcement and a sense of value.

Therefore, only after the individual appreciates the value of their small contributions and the uniqueness of their G-dly soul and the great potential of even their animal soul, will they be ready for the "tough love" that will disfigure and reshape their "body," the makeup of their personality that was shaped and molded by alien influences.

This too is the message in the sixth commandment not to commit murder. Destroying someone's being for its own sake is never warranyed. Even when one must destroy the other's structure it can only be done when there is a new structure that will take its place.

Connection to the Messianic Age

In general terms, all of exile can be likened to the plague of boils that, as Kabbalists have taught us, is a process that refines us by removing the Egyptian body from our Jewish souls and makes us receptive for the revelation of G-dliness that will accompany the future Redemption.

And just as the plague of boils occurred through Moses (exemplified by the statement in the Torah that describes how "they were unable to stand before Moses"), so too, the

process of destroying the body of exile must come about through Moshiach, who is imbued with the soul of Moses.

Only one who is filled with love for his people—as Moses and Moshiach are—can use tough love. Only Moses and Moshiach—and the spark of Moses and Moshiach within our soul—can successfully deconstruct the Egyptian/exile mindset and replace it with a Geulah/Redemption mindset.

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Therapy: Boils that deformed their bodies suggests that we must alter the structure of our personalities. Whereas in the first five plagues, only token, and external changes were called for, the second set of plagues demand drastic changes that totally alter one's personality. One can no longer stand before Moses with their original structure.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE SEVENTH STEP: BARAD-*HAIL*
BRINGING IT ALL INSIDE

Fire and Water

The plagues are getting more destructive. This seventh plague of hail put an even greater dent in the economy of Egypt as it destroyed many of the crops and livestock. Furthermore it also killed people who stayed outside. It also was more miraculous than any previous plague because it combined fire and water.

To understand the significance of the seventh plague of hail in terms of its therapeutic value, a brief summary of the last six plagues is in order.

One must first destroy all the icons (first two plagues of blood and frogs). One must then recognize the need to make small and incremental changes (the third plague of lice), while appreciating how special they are, both their G-dly soul and even their animal soul (the fourth and fifth plagues of the mixture of animals and pestilence, respectively). At that point we are ready to destroy the Egyptian Weltanschauung that has come to define us (the sixth plague of boils).

The seventh plague of *barad*-hail, which consisted on both fire and water, symbolizes the twin forces of destruction: fiery passion and icy indifference. The Torah relates that those people and animals that were outside were all destroyed. Those who went inside and brought their animals with them were spared.

One Overarching Goal

Translated into terms of human growth and development (thereby saving one's G-dly and animal souls) this means that it is crucial that we go "inside." In Talmudic parlance the "outside" is referred to as *reshut harabim*, "the domain of the **many**" while the "inside" is characterized as *reshut hayachid,* "the **exclusive** domain."

To rebuild ones personality in the proper mold, one must take all of his or her ideas, goals and life's experience and bring them "inside," into a world that is dominated by one overarching, G-dly objective.

This does not mean that we cannot be multifaceted. On the contrary, this seventh step for self-improvement and spiritual development urges us to take all of our multifaceted talents and ideas etc., and have them reflect a unified purpose.

Staying outside leaves us with two problems. First, we are vulnerable to the fiery passions that run loose in the outside world. There are no walls or barriers that can restrain us. In the street, everything goes. Insofar as the positive aspects of life, the outside can sometimes be cold and indifferent to those efforts.

Going inside in this context entails having a cozy place to serve as a shelter from the hostile and harmful influences of the outside world. Having a warm Jewish home or retreating to a synagogue or a House of Study can provide us with security and fortify us with strength.

Second, staying outside with all of its confusion and fragmentation will leave us frustrated and conflicted.

As long as we are scattered in all directions, pursuing multiple interests and goals, we cannot fully enjoy any of these tasks. Each task and direction will conflict with the other. When engaged in one area, we might be distracted by our concerns for the other goal. When we split ourselves into so many pieces and spread ourselves thin—a staple of modern life—we seem to be nowhere.

How can we be diversified and happy? Or to put it in terms of our emotional and spiritual development, how can we grow when we cannot anchor ourselves in any one area?

The answer is that we have to direct our multifaceted energies towards one overarching goal—bringing everything into the domain of the one G-d.

Contrary to the popular misconception that "religious" people are very narrow, this lesson actually teaches us that the reverse is true. Without the unity of purpose provided for by religion, we cannot fully experience and enjoy all of our diverse pursuits. If one is scattered in every direction, they are nowhere. Their multiple interests amount to nothing.

By contrast, the person who is focused on one higher goal, by bringing all of his efforts into the "private domain," will be able to savor each of these experiences.

A simple analogy could help explain the difference between the secular and religious approach:

A person who wishes to travel to a certain place can take many routes to reach his or her destination. Indeed, the person who knows where he or she wants to go will frequently take different routes to the same location. And whenever they discover a new route or a more scenic route, it could generate pleasure and excitement. "Getting there is half the fun," as the saying goes. Since they are secure in their objectives, every part of the way towards that goal is rewarding. It acquires some of the meaning that the goal possesses.

On the other hand, each direction or route that a person travels without a specific goal in mind is a burden. Travel becomes a frustrating experience for one who either has no goal or is uncertain about it, and does not know precisely where he or she wants to go.

We can now understand why our Sages in the Midrash state that this plague was a punishment for the Egyptians for forcing the Jews to plant crops and orchards for Egyptians.

On the surface this does not seem to be a serious crime on their part. Compared to back-breaking slave labor in building cities and pyramids planting crops is not so bad.

Perhaps, the evil inherent in their behavior was the fact that they forced the Israelites into diverse areas of labor, without having any goal. It was diversification for the sake of not letting them get into one area; never feel comfortable and at home and not have any specific unifying goal.

Parallels the Seventh Commandment

This plague thus parallels the seventh commandment, "Do not commit adultery."

Committing adultery in the spiritual realm is to be **wed** to more than one ideal. The plague of hail that forces us to

take ourselves and our animals inside an exclusive domain prevents us from being wed to different ideologies and ideals that proliferate "outside,"

To bring everything in to the exclusive domain of G-d is the parallel of a monogamous relationship.

Divine Attribute: Chesed

The attribute of *chesed* translated as kindness is also associated with the emotion of love and passion. The prohibition against adultery was directed against those whose faculty of *chesed* could lead to relationships that take the notion of love to forbidden extremes. In fact, the Torah uses the word *chesed* to describe incest and other immoral acts.

The individual who is "outside" in the "public domain" and suffers from attachments to multiple experiences and engagements suffers from an overactive and misguided sense of *chesed* in the figurative sense, as well as in the practical sense, not having or knowing where to go.

Rather than extending love to multiple partners as we go through the plethora of experiences and causes in our lives, we should experience a much more powerful expression of love to the one G-d and to the Divine in all that we do. When our marriage to G-d is exclusive, then all of our

other relationships and commitments are more wholesome and positive—manifestations of *chesed.*

Connection to Moshiach

In the Messianic Era, the world, in its entirety will become an "exclusive domain" for G-d. Numerous Biblical citations point to how, in the Messianic Age, the entire world will recognize the oneness of G-d.

Indeed, the *Shema*, Judaism's most important declaration is interpreted by Rashi to mean that in the future Messianic Age all the nations will come around to the same belief in and understanding of G-d's unity.

But the idea of convergence in the Messianic Age goes even further. Not only will there be a convergence of minds, but all of the universe will truly reflect the absolute exclusivity of G-d. Not only that there is no other G-d, but, moreover, that there is nothing besides G-d. All of existence is but a manifestation of G-d and His creative energy.

While we may be aware of this concept now, it will then become a manifest reality for all of Creation. The entire universe will be shown to be part of the exclusive domain of the one G-d.

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Therapy: We must recognize that many of our problems and hindrances to further growth derive from exposure to the diffusion of outside influences. One must take oneself and one's animal "inside" in a private domain, where there is a unity of purpose. Find a spiritual place where there is warmth and unified meaning.

CHAPTER EIGHT
THE EIGHTH STEP: ARBEH-*LOCUST*
COVERING THE EYE OF THE LAND

Redundancy

Locust was the most devastating plague to date because it destroyed all of Egypt's food supply, portending a famine of historic proportions that would kill most Egyptians in the future.

The Torah describes the extent of this plague as one in which the locusts "covered the face of the whole earth."

What does this plague tell us about our emotional and spiritual development?

Now that we've progressed to the point where we have destroyed the icons, recognize our potential for growth, eliminated the Egyptian Weltanschauung and have taken all of our diversified areas of expression "inside," there is still a need to apply the eighth plague of *arbeh*-locust to our quest for spiritual development.

The plague of locust destroyed the crops and guaranteed a famine. Furthermore, the Torah describes what the effects of the plague of locusts will be. G-d told Moses that there will be so many of them to the extent that they will "cover

the eye [view] of the land and no one will be able to see the earth."

What is meant by the "eye of the land?" Simply it means that their view of the land would be obscured by the covering of locusts. But if that was the only meaning, why would the Torah add that no one will be able to see the earth?" Isn't it redundant? If their view would be blocked, then it is obvious that they would not be able to see the earth.

Two Perspectives

The "eye" represents the way we look at things. There are two general different perspectives to everything. The first is to see things "outside in." The second is to view everything "inside out."

The "outside in" perspective is associated with and represented by the earth. It is the perspective in life that comes from the reality we call earth. The day to day exigencies of life inform us how to view things. We judge all that happens from the vantage point of our earthly existence; what we call "reality."

And then there is the perspective that comes from wisdom, specifically Divine wisdom that is embodied in the Torah that sees things from "above."

One might think that it suffices to have the right direction in life (provided for by the seventh plague) that directs us to focus inwards, to the domain of one.

In truth, the seventh plague that taught us how to bring everything "inside" is not the end of the process. Its underlying premise is that we begin outside—with its fragmented and alien ways—and as we enter "inside," we super impose a new, unified perspective on our "outside" template. But because we began with the underlying premise of the existential reality of the outside world, we can never fully appreciate a unity that appears to be a super-imposed reality, not the intrinsic and exclusive reality.

With the eighth plague we are informed that there is an even higher perspective that sees everything form the unified vantage point of the "inside." And it is from that vantage point that it disperses this knowledge to the outside.

Our starting point then, is no longer the "outside," worldly perspective. Our default position rather is the Torah-G-dly wisdom one—the view from the "inside."

Thus the plague of locust covered up the earthy perspective and created a sense of hunger about which the prophet stated: "They will be hungry not for bread, but for the word of G-d." In Biblical parlance, bread and food are

metaphors for Torah knowledge that must be studied and digested. One must always strive to learn more just as if he had not eaten anything. To grow, one must have a G-dly transcendent philosophy of life that becomes one's primary source of reality, not just a philosophy that provides for a general direction towards life. This, G-dly philosophy is the Torah, specifically the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidut, which focus on the spiritual and G-dly dimension of existence.

According to the Midrash, this plague was a punishment for the Egyptians because they compelled the Israelites to plant wheat and spelt.

The symbolism behind planting grain, as opposed to the planting of "orchards" mentioned in relation to the seventh plague is that wheat and spelt from which bread is baked are essentially absolute necessities of life. Other crops, particularly fruit, are of secondary or tertiary importance. They are "icing on the cake," so to speak.

The difference then between the "fruit" metaphor and the "wheat" metaphor is that the convergence inside—represented by the seventh plague of hail—was like fruit and a spiritual luxury. This means that the awareness of unity that one acquires is not one's primary view of life; it is a secondary perspective. One's basic outlook remains

that which was generated from and consumed in the "outside."

With the advent of the eighth plague, the concept and realization of unity becomes one's staple, one's basic perception of the reality of life. The "outside" view of things will be relegated to secondary status or lower—"the view of the earth was obscured."

Parallel to the Eighth Commandment

The eighth commandment not to steal according to the Talmud is essentially a commandment against kidnapping and selling the victim. By extension, it applies to all forms of theft.

What all forms of theft have in common is that they involve taking something away from an exclusive domain, in terms of ownership. Usually it involves the literal transfer of the person or goods from inside a house to the outside. It is the negative counterpart of the process of taking the unity of the private domain into the outside.

Divine Attribute – Da'at

This plague of Locust can be linked to the attribute of *da'at*, commonly translated as knowledge. However, the more precise rendition of *da'at* is a form of knowledge that

attaches the knower to the knowledge. It is a form of knowing that makes the knowledge an integral part of the person, not some super imposed acquisition of information or awareness that is secondary to one's primary perceptions.

This clearly parallels the idea of the locusts totally obscuring the view of the earth. Only one view prevails in this approach; the view and knowledge from Above.

Part of this step to spiritual growth and freedom involves the hunger for more knowledge. This too is related to *da'at*. It is indicative of the Messianic promise that the "earth will be filled with the **knowledge** of G-d..." *Da'at*-Knowledge, in Chassidic philosophy, is the key to unlocking all of our emotions, and all of the preceding steps in our development are deepened by the process of knowledge.

Connection to Moshiach

Living in exile on the threshold of Moshiach has certain challenges. One the one hand, we still see things with an exile tainted eye—the "outside in" approach. On the other hand, because we are standing on the threshold of the Era of Redemption, we are capable of altering our mindset into a Moshiach oriented one by study of Torah, specifically the subject of Moshiach and Redemption.

Torah, the Talmud tells us, has the capacity to alter the nature of the world and that includes the very nature of our thought processes. Thus, Torah study—specifically the inner dimension of Torah, and more specifically the parts of Torah that deal with Moshiach—is the medium through which we alter our perceptions and acquire true knowledge of G-d

We are living in unique times. Countless numbers of Jews are demonstrating a tremendous thirst for the knowledge of Torah making the foregoing Biblical prophecy a reality. It is high time that we see the fulfillment of the other prophecies that announce the coming of Moshiach and the complete Redemption that will usher in an age when the "world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea."

At that time the prophet predicts we will all see "eye to eye" with G-d. Indeed, the prophet declares that "All **flesh** will see that the mouth of G-d has spoken"—even the earthy flesh shall be endowed with G-d's unique perspective.

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Therapy: One must devour all the food supply. Food is a metaphor for intellectual stimulation that comes from the outside. It is not enough do escape from the influences of

modern culture and its, emotional attractions, one's intellect must be nourished by only healthy knowledge. We must cultivate an "inside-out" way of seeing things.

CHAPTER NINE
THE NINTH STEP: CHOSHECH-*DARKNESS*
THE LAST PREREQUISITE

Out of Order

The plague of darkness is by far the most enigmatic plague. It appears not be in order, for it did not cause more harm than the preceding ones.

Unless the darkness caused paralysis and psychological damage that was far more debilitating than the boils, it did not wreak much havoc. This begs for an explanation, why did G-d leave this relatively moderate plague for the end?

Rashi seems to have been troubled by this question. His explanation of this plague is that it facilitated the burial of the Jews who didn't want to leave Egypt. There were a large number of Israelites who refused to leave Egypt. Tragically, they all perished then and were buried during the plague of darkness so that the Egyptians would not be aware of this tragedy.

In addition, our Sages tell us, while the Egyptians were stuck in their homes oblivious to their surroundings; the Israelites surveyed their homes and discovered the whereabouts of all their valuables. When the Israelites, upon G-d's request, asked the Egyptians for clothing and

valuables ("reparations" for centuries of oppression and slavery) the Egyptians denied that they had them, whereupon the Israelites identified the hiding places of their treasures.

What in this plague—including the two functions of the plague mentioned by Rashi—could teach us anything about our emotional and spiritual development?

We will understand this in the context of the eighth plague, the plague of Locust. Locust, which devoured the crops to the extent that one could not "see the eye of the earth," represents the complete change of one's perspective. To accomplish this, it was discussed, one must have an insatiable hunger for the knowledge of Torah, inasmuch as Torah study has the capacity to alter one's exile mentality into a liberated spiritual one.

It is at this point, when the Israelites were ready for the moment of Redemption, that the ninth plague of darkness occurred. It served as the last prerequisite to achieving spiritual freedom.

Arresting the Egyptian Mindset

What does all this mean in a spiritual context?

In terms of spiritual development, the plague of darkness represents the total arresting of the Egyptian mindset that

follows the complete saturation of one's mind in the wisdom of Torah. The plague of darkness caused total paralysis of the Egyptian mindset.

Even when instilled with a Torah perspective that sees things from the inside out, we may still be vulnerable. Once we exit the inner precincts of Torah study to spread the light to the world—the theme of the eighth plague—we must secure ourselves so that we will not be affected by the outside. Any contact with a negative force can have a deleterious, albeit subtle, effect. The plague of darkness renders every Egyptian "outside" influence null and void.

Finding the Hidden Treasures

Moreover, even the most spiritually sophisticated individual can still have some "outside" negative influences that are embedded deeply in their soul. Conversely, there may be some positive energy that one has not accessed because it is rooted so deeply in one's psyche.

This plague of darkness represents the need and the ability to "excavate" and find all the hidden negativity (represented by those who refused to leave the exile) and the hidden positive energy (represented by the hidden treasures they discovered).

Two Mistakes

This plague also guaranteed that we do not make two fatal mistakes in our spiritual liberation experience.

The first thing that happens when we leave Egypt, the prototype of all exile experiences, is to not want to part with what has become part of us. And as much as we are intellectually convinced of the limiting and even degrading nature of exile, we loath to give it up, much like a baby is reluctant to give up the filth that it created.

During the plague of darkness, the Jews buried all of those who had a love affair with their exile experience and do not want to part with it. In doing so, they were able to leave Egypt and experience true freedom.

Taking the Treasures of Exile with us

Conversely, there are those who revert to the opposite extreme by so repudiating the exile experience that they leave behind the treasures that they gained from it.

While exile is a negative experience, there are hidden treasures that were planted there. These are the lessons we learn from adversity. These are the areas of growth that comes from the unique challenges that exist only in exile. Indeed, whenever we rise above the constraints of the exile experience, we discover an incredible treasure. And upon leaving exile we must take these treasures along with us.

Kabbalah and Chassidut teach us that exile is actually a time when the most sublime energies are generated, but cannot be accessed until the Messianic Age. Going out of exile is complete when we realize what treasures are embedded in it.

Tragically, there are those who reverse the process, while they take along the *galut*/slave/exile mentality with them, they leave the treasures behind. The plague of darkness was thus directed to all those who are at the final stage of redemption to know what to take along with them and what to leave behind.

The ninth plague, according to the Midrash, was a punishment for the Egyptians because they darkened the lives of the Jews.

Their design was to completely eradicate the Jewish person's ability to see spirituality, and to have even a glimmer of hope to get out of exile. The glimmer of hope might have made their plight somewhat tolerable. Even that trace of light the Egyptians sought to extinguish.

In spiritual terms, the Egyptian form of assimilation and exile seeks to completely extinguish the G-dly light of our souls.

In the end, it was the Egyptian culture that was darkened and their influence has long ceased to exist. The Jewish people have survived and will endure and continued to

spread the untarnished light of G-d throughout the world until such time that they will leave the darkness of exile completely—taking along with them the treasures generated in exile..

Parallel to the Ninth Commandment

This plague of darkness can be said to parallel the ninth commandment not to bear false testimony. A Jew, even in exile, exists to serve as a testimony to G-d's presence in this world, through the way we express His presence in our lives.

When a Jew, as a result of exile conditions allows this perception to be clouded and considers himself or herself a part of exile, he or she is in effect bearing false testimony against G-d and against himself or herself.

With the plague of darkness, and the burial of the exile tainted mindset, we become valid witnesses.

Divine Attribute: Binah

The attribute of *binah*, translated as understanding, is actually the intellectual process where we take a seminal idea and give it form. It represents the development of an idea, giving it breadth and depth.

When one has a fleeting, superficial or partial understanding of a concept they cannot experience the full measure of joy the idea generates. Only when one has a fully developed understanding of a concept can one's joy be complete. The faculty of *binah* is alluded to in the verse: "The mother of the children rejoices." *Binah* is the "mother" and source of the emotions that lead to a sense of satisfaction and joy.

The ninth plague represents our ability to penetrate the darkness that shrouds a given subject and see the light. This is a function of *binah,* and this is what happened to the Israelites during the plague of darkness. They were able to see though the darkness and find the hidden treasures.

Connection to Moshiach

The Messianic Age is when we will be guaranteed that we will no longer be vulnerable to the Egyptian/exile mentality.

It is also the time when all the hidden evil will be expunged and the hidden good and treasures will be fully revealed—the two effects of the plague of darkness.

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Therapy: The next to the last step in the therapy of destroying the negativity that inhibits us and enslaves us is to recognize that utter darkness and futility of conventional

knowledge. One must seek to find the hidden negative and positive traits embedded within our psyche and deal with them accordingly. This penultimate step also involves burying, once and for all, all of our constraining weaknesses, and discovering the treasures that exist in our negative past; taking it along with us on our Journey to spiritual perfection.

CHAPTER TEN
THE TENTH STEP: MAKKAT BECHOROT-*THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN*
PRESERVING OUR ELITE FACULTIES

Firstborn a Metaphor for Our Elite Talents

The death of the firstborn was obviously the most devastating plague, because it actually killed at least one family member in each household.

According to the teachings of Chassidus and Kabbalah, at midnight, when the plague occurred, the greatest G-dly revelation took place. It was an awesome G-dly force that combined and unified night and day. This was the ultimate plague in terms of its destructive nature as well as in the sense of its G-dly revelation.

This final plague can also serve as the ultimate step in our spiritual self-advancement, wherein our firstborn is spared even as the firstborn Egyptians perish.

The firstborn is a metaphor for the elite powers and talents we possess. By successfully completing all of the nine preceding steps, we reach our goal of total self-actualization, where our most elite faculties are alive and well.

But before we can actualize our elite talents we must destroy the elite forces of *mitzraim* with their confining, suffocating and destructive nature. This death of the firstborn is the destruction of the most powerful, elite forces of *mitzraim*. The most potent and destructive part of a person or a nation is its ego. The plague of the firstborn was G-d's way of finally attacking their ego by attacking their most elite members. And when we destroy the ego that stands in the way of expressing our true identities, it is time to leave *mitzraim* and experience true freedom.

Building a Positive Ego

Applying this to our own self-development, the destruction of the ego alone does not suffice. One must also build a positive ego in its place. The tenth plague therefore comprised a simultaneous destruction of the Egyptian firstborn while saving and sparing the Israelite firstborn. Thus, the *b'chor*-the firstborn became holy.

The positive ego that was introduced at the time of this plague is the recognition that we are the children of G-d. We possess a holy soul that comes form G-d's wisdom; and as *Tanya* explains based on Maimonides, "G-d and His

wisdom are one." We therefore possess a soul that is one with G-d.

And just as a child originates in the mind of his father, so too, our souls originate in G-d's wisdom. Thus, we are essentially a part of G-d. This part of us is our own firstborn power and it is holy.

This essential bond between G-d and us that can never be severed was revealed during the plague of the firstborn, and it is the final step in getting out of exile.

Continuity

In addition, to the awareness of one's unique G-dly identity, the Tenth Plague therapy can assist us in overcoming a feeling that stunts our growth. It is the fear that our achievements will not endure. Why bother to scale the heights of spirituality when we fear that it will not endure?

The fact that the firstborn of the Israelites were spared even as their Egyptian counterparts all perished, conveys a comforting message to all of us: Only when one lives within the confining and stifling environment of Egypt-*Mitzraim* (that means "straits" and confinement) is there a justifiable fear that one's legacy and achievements will not endure.

In the quest for spiritual growth, however, there is a guarantee that our most precious legacies (represented by the firstborn), will endure forever.

Our Sages of the Midrash tell us that this final plague was a punishment for enslaving G-d's first child. It is a crime to not recognize the spiritual talents that we possess and it is an equally egregious crime when we try to inhibit, control and confine these talents.

Parallel to Tenth Commandment

This plague can be said to parallel the tenth commandment not to covet the possessions of another. One of the reasons why people covet the possessions of others is because they look at the gains of others and fail to appreciate their own special qualities.

With the final removal of every obstacle to revealing our own most powerful and rich nature, we no longer need to be validated by others—we are the firstborn!

The Divine Attribute: *Chochma*

Chochma is the first and most elite of the Divine Attributes. It is the first flash of light in the intellectual and

spiritual process; it is the part of our soul that is expressive of our strongest attachment to G-d.

According to *Tanya*, it is the source of inspiration and energy for the Jew to give his or her life for G-d rather than betraying his or her loyalty to Him. This is the elite force that every one of us possesses, although we are not always aware of its presence. And it is the counterforce to the *chutzpah* associated with the ego of *mitzraim.*

When the level of *chochma* is revealed, it empowers us more than anything else and can even transform our entire being.

Connection to Moshiach

Maimonides describes the ultimate Messianic age as a time when there will be no more envy because the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d. When we realize this ultimate knowledge, including the knowledge of one's own elite nature, we no longer can be jealous of another. This freedom to be ourselves and not be envious of others is the reward that comes with the successful culmination of the Ten-Plague therapy.

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Therapy: The plague of the firstborn involves destroying the ego that is associated with Mitzraim and cultivating the Divine ego. The tenth plague comprised a simultaneous destruction of the Egyptian first born and a saving of the Israelites. This final step of spiritual development is to get in touch with our most elite force of chochma. Once we reach this awareness we no longer have to look at others; we are free to be ourselves and to reach total self-actualization, which is the actualization of our G-dly essence.